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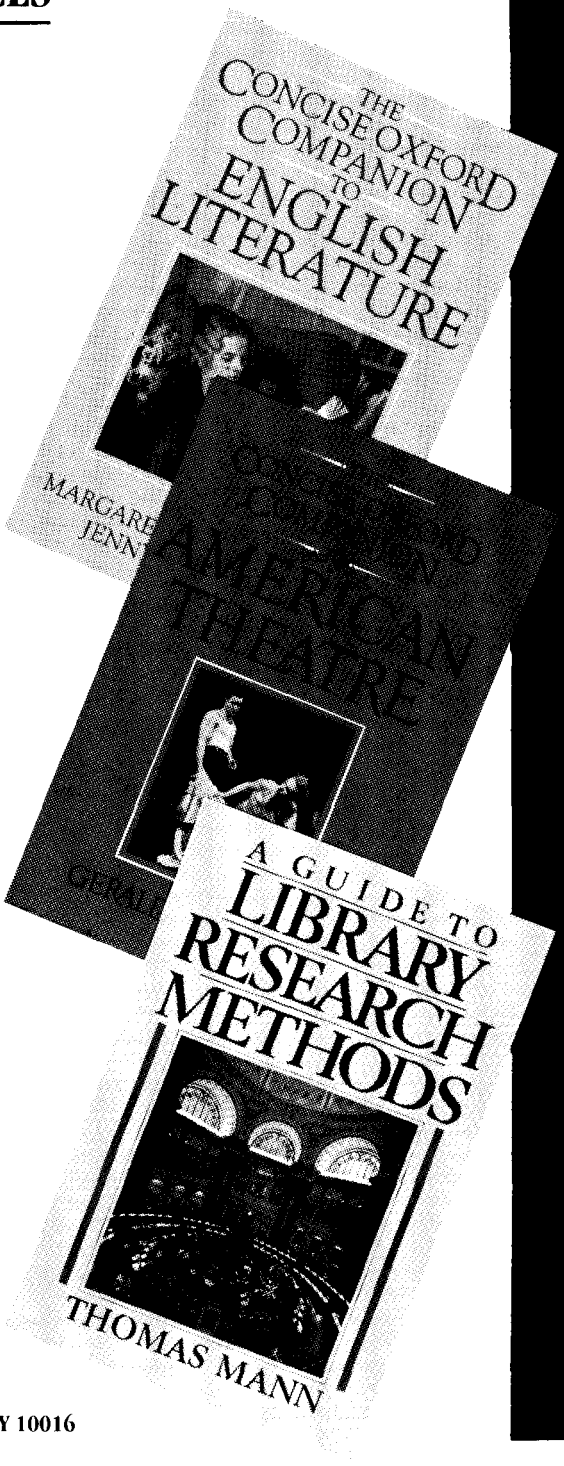

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CONTENTS

Quotatious
Aristides 7

The Stakes in Anthropology
Ernest Gellner 17

Gibbon's Historical Imagination
G. W. Bowersock 33

Staying Alive: Some Home Truths About Population
William Petersen 51

The Strange Story of Herschel Grynszpan
Michael R. Marrus 69

L. S. Vygotsky's "New" Theory of Mind
James V. Wertsch 81

An Afternoon with Agnon: A Face to Meet the Faces
Baruch Hochman 91

Caring New World: Feminism and Science
Margarita Levin 100

"Civil Politics" in the Middle East
Elie Kedourie 107

Lewis Mumford: From the Belly of the Whale
Wilfred M. McClay 111

Classical Scholarship for a Classical Country
Arnaldo Momigliano 119

POETRY

The Subtender
Jeffrey Greene 31

Running the Projector in Reverse
Richard Béziat 48

How Many Doors
E. B. de Vito 50

The Handbell Choir
Jane Flanders 80

Sunlight Snowfall
Tom Hansen 89

Assisi
Robert Cording 90

Readings
Neal Bowers 129

BOOKS

Founding Father
Hugh Lloyd-Jones 130

Reviews
Janet Groth, Michael Levin, Fareed Zakaria, L. H. Gann, William H. Pritchard, Thomas P. Riggio, David H. Pinkney 134

THE READER REPLIES 158

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Quotatious

ARISTIDES

A reviewer of a recent book of mine accused me—I believe it was an accusation—of being an uninhibited "phrase dropper," by which he meant that I seem to go in for quotation in a big way. He is perfectly correct, of course. I do tend to quote extensively, sometimes even extravagantly. What is more, now that I think about it, I have done so for much of my life. Although I like to attend to constructive criticism, reform here is, I fear, quite hopeless. "*Vi tsu zibn,*" as the old Yiddish saying has it, "*azoy tsu zibetsik.*" ("As at seven, so at seventy.") See what I mean? I just did it again. I am not merely a habitual quoter but an incorrigible one. I am, I may as well face it, more quotatious than an old stock-market ticker-tape machine, except that you can't unplug me.

As it turns out, my first serious quotational work did come, as the Yiddish saying I just quoted has it, at roughly the age of seven. It was my father whom I first chose to quote. I happened to grow up in a neighborhood in which I was the youngest boy by some two years. This carried certain penalties. In choose-up baseball games I could count on being sent out to the Siberia known as right field; in football I was invariably assigned the position of center (as in the then-popular phrase "dunk the center"). When someone was required as the target for the kind of free-lance vicious teasing that boys on a playground tend to go in for to break the monotony, I, younger and smaller than everyone else, was always at hand.

When I reported my dissatisfaction about these matters to my father, he instructed me never to back down before a bully. "Remember," he said to me, "the bigger they are, the harder they fall." I guessed that this must be true, but it seemed to me even then to elude the serious technical problem of how in the first place to make them fall, which, when one is 3'9", and weighs sixty or so pounds, can be troublesome. "Remember," my father said, "behind every bully lies a coward." I rather liked that one, and a day or two later used it on one of my chief tormentors, a muscular (for ten years old) Irish kid named Denny Price. "My father says," I reported, always careful about correct attribution, "that behind every bully, Price, lies a coward." "Aw," he replied, "ya fadda's an ———," and here he let fly a word that spun me around more than any of his rabbit punches on my arms and that not even today am I prepared to quote.

I cannot say that I did much quoting as an adolescent. This was owing to the fact that I read so little, and from little reading little quotation can flow. Instead I often quoted my friends as they often quoted me. Comedy was a big item among us, and we always took delight in reporting the wild or witty things one or another of us had said to a substitute physics teacher, a coach, or a date. Retelling anecdotes, with a quotation as a punch line, was one of our leading forms of entertainment. I know that when anything even faintly amusing happened to me, I worked it up—editing it, embellishing it, exaggerating it slightly when necessary—for oral publication among my friends. If I then had any clear notion of what a writer was, which I didn't, I should have understood that I had the temperamental makings of a writer, insofar as no experience was ever quite complete for me until I retold it, and the retelling generally turned out to be as sweet—often sweeter—than the original experience. I also discovered, in this very small circle, that I hugely enjoyed being quoted for having said clever things when my own stories were retold by various of my friends.

"Only my tailor measures me correctly,"

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exclaimed the young man, as he began his fall from atop the dining room table at the fraternity house dance. He was then heard to mutter "Samuel Johnson" from his prone position on the floor, head resting on his crooked arm, before passing out, I won't say "like a patient etherised upon a table," yet in pretty bad shape nonetheless. The young man is nineteen and undergoing a conversion, not a religious but an intellectual conversion. More precisely, he has found himself aflame with passion for things he does not half understand: the poetry of T. S. Eliot and E. E. Cummings, serious music, modern art, the idea of the avant-garde, bohemianism. He has been called a "pseudo-intellectual," a label that isn't quite accurate, for he is not even a real fake. However inchoately he may understand the world of books and art and intellectual things, he feels he genuinely loves them. While attempting to penetrate the meaning of the poetry of Hart Crane, he nevertheless reserves the right to sit in on high-stakes poker games. Owing to such behavior, that line of Samuel Johnson—"Only my tailor measures me correctly"—applies nicely to him, or so he believes, and he is thrilled enough by it to announce it just before passing out on a college boy's rowdy drunk.

Where I found that Samuel Johnson quotation I cannot now say. Certainly, at nineteen I had not read *The Life of Johnson,* or anything by Johnson himself. (I have, on subsequent searching, not been able to rediscover it, and I hope that I have got it right.) When I think about that quotation today, however, I must say that I think Samuel Johnson, dressing as sloppily as he did, had a hell of a nerve bringing his tailor into any discussion. Nowadays, given the scruffiness of Johnson and the litigiousness of modern life, the tailor would probably sue and deserve to win his case. At the time, the appositeness of Johnson's line to my own life appeared exact; it seemed, to adapt a sartorial phrase of which Samuel Johnson apparently had no personal experience, a very snug fit. To think that another human being had thought about his life as I had about mine, and that the man was as profound as I had heard rumor Samuel Johnson was—well, it went right to my heart.

Actually, it still does. So, too, do a great many other quotations. A quotation, which I take to be something looser than a proverb or a maxim or an aphorism, all of which are themselves usually quotable, is anything well or interestingly put that bears repeating. Any statement, comment, or remark that is apt, elegantly formulated, comical, or outrageous qualifies. "Remarks are not literature," Gertrude Stein once said to Hemingway, but they can nonetheless be very interesting, as is the foregoing remark by Miss Stein. Someone—Cyril Connolly? Ezra Pound?—once said that anything that can be read twice is literature; I would say that anything that can be said twice is quotable.

Or, as the case may be, written twice. I shall tell you how the case is with me. So enamored am I of a striking thought neatly formulated that roughly twenty years ago I began writing down in small notebooks all such thoughts I came upon in my reading. I have only recently begun my twenty-second such notebook. Never much of a collector as a child—not of comic books, tin soldiers, baseball cards—I now collect striking thoughts found in the work of other writers. I was never very good at keeping my toys in order as a child, and I am not much better now with my quotations. "Every man of character," says Nietzsche, "repeats the same experience throughout his life." I don't know if I have the character to qualify, but my repeated experience has to do with file systems that break down. I have left jobs—I won't say promising jobs—because my files for these jobs had become hopeless. So now with my twenty-one books of quotations. The prospect of finding anything in them—hopeless, absolutely hopeless.

Still, I persist. In me the habit of writing out quotations, like that of quoting itself, has proceeded from a habit to a tic. I seem to be unable to stop it. "That's marvelous," I say to myself when reading, "must write it down." The witty ("Stupidity is always amazing, no matter how used to it you become"—Jean Cocteau), the amusing ("A teacher is a person who never says anything once"—Howard Nemerov), the profound ("It is only the very greatest kind of artist who presents us with experiences that we recognize both as fundamental and as in advance of anything we have hitherto known"—J. W. N. Sullivan)—all get scribbled down in my perforated Mead notebooks. While reading writers of great formulatory power—Henry James, Santayana, Proust—I find I can scarcely get through a page without having to stop to record some

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lapidary sentence. Reading Henry James, for example, I have muttered to myself, "C'mon, Henry, turn down the brilliance a notch, so I can get some reading done."

I may be one of a very small number of people who have developed writer's cramp while reading. We're a compulsive but amiable crew, those of us who feel, or have felt, the compulsion to re-record the bright thoughts of other men and women. In recent decades our numbers have included Louis Kronenberger, W. H. Auden, John Gross, and J. Bryan, III, all of whom have published collections of aphorisms or commonplace books. In the nineteenth century, Robert Southey produced a commonplace book, and Arthur Conan Doyle bestowed one upon Sherlock Holmes. I suppose that my twenty-one notebooks constitute something like a commonplace book, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as a book "in which one records passages or matters to be especially remembered or referred to, with or without arrangement."

The oddest among us may have been an Englishman named Geoffrey Madan, who was born in 1895 and died in 1947 and whom Harold Macmillan recalls at Oxford as having "something of the look of those young men who stand about to no apparent purpose in Renaissance paintings." Madan, educated at Eton and Balliol, was handsome and learned, wonderfully well connected and full of a promise that never came to fruition. He was shaken, apparently for life, by service in Mesopotamia during World War I. After an attack of meningitis in his thirtieth year, he retired permanently on (naturally) a private income, and gave himself over to the connoisseurship of claret, beautiful books, and charming sentences, anecdotes, phrases, and jokes, which he collected in a series of notebooks. For a time, from 1929 to 1933, he annually culled fifty-two items from these notebooks and had them elegantly printed and sent to friends at Christmas. In 1981 John Sparrow and J. A. Gere brought out a selection entitled *Geoffrey Madan's Notebooks*, which contains such jollily offbeat items as the seven-year-old daughter of a friend asking why no food is blue, and two other friends remarking, respectively, that "Diana Manners has no heart, but her brains are in the right place" and "the Bible tells us to forgive our enemies; not our friends."

Although there is very little of Geoffrey Madan in *Geoffrey Madan's Notebooks*, which is composed chiefly of things he had read or heard other people say, when you have read through this slender volume you feel rather as if you have come to know Madan—and in a way that you may not feel you know the author of a book of twice the length, every word of which was written by the author. Merely by knowing what he finds amusing, and what profound, one feels one comes to know the man himself. W. H. Auden, who was nervous about being the subject of a biography, felt that he had tipped his mitt quite as much as he cared to when he published *A Certain World*, his commonplace book, a compilation that he recognized to be "a sort of autobiography." In a brief foreword to the volume, he noted: "Here, then, is a map of my planet." I believe it was Gayelord Hauser, the nutritionist, who said that "you are what you eat," but if you happen to be an intellectual, you are what you quote.

Old billiards players will have noticed that I have just used that largely irrelevant Gayelord Hauser quotation as a cushion against which to kiss off for a more relevant point. Conventional use of quotation is, of course, more straightforward, and its most common use is to supply authority. Clergymen have been known to use scripture in this way—to support, nail down, Q.E.D. an argument. In secular life, Marxists do much the same thing; in the work of a Marxist literary critic, a quotation from the Boss (and I don't mean Bruce Springsteen) carries the same authoritative weight as a passage from the Gospels at a revival meeting. But then argument by quotation is something that at one time or another most people in intellectual life have engaged in. As long as you know you are in for a fight, you may as well bring along a few heavies, tough guys with names like Al de Tocqueville, Fred Nietzsche, Max Weber, with whose help you can wipe up the opposition.

Whom one brings along can be decisive. I have, for example, just had second thoughts about Tocqueville, who by now may well have been used in too many such scraps. How often, after all, can a man be quoted? Or how often the same quotation used? Santayana's "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned [not "to repeat it," as is often misquoted, but] to fulfil it" has by now been used so often that it has had to be brought back into the shop for retreading. As for

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Yeats's "the centre cannot hold," well, I am sorry to report, neither can this quotation or any part of the famous passage in the poem "The Second Coming" from which it derives. Even the most dazzling brilliance can lose its luster. As a clever high-school student is once said to have asked, "If the Bible and Shakespeare are so important, how come they contain so many clichés?"

Few things are literarily drearier than indiscriminate quotation, by which I mean not quoting too much but quoting the wrong people. I know a sophisticated historical scholar who judges a book in part by the quality of its quotations—that is to say, by its index more than by its cover or table of contents. She has a point. In a work of political science, it is much more exhilarating to find the names of Niccolò Machiavelli and Alexander Herzen than those of Christopher Lasch and Michael Walzer; in a work of literary criticism, it is much more delightful to find quotations from Matthew Arnold and Paul Valéry than from Frank Kermode and Stanley Fish. In general, quoting living writers is a tricky business. I have read essays in which the authors have quoted such writers as Erik Erikson, David Reisman, and Robert Penn Warren as if they carried talismanic authority; but they don't, not to everyone they don't. That Erik Erikson, David Reisman, or Robert Penn Warren may happen to have said something that agrees with your general point may be nice, but among serious folks they don't, by the mere magic weight of their names, cut much ice, lox, or even cream cheese. A quotation, when you get right down to it, is no way to win an argument.

Quotation outside argument can be a most idiosyncratic business and, as with other departments of life, not without its little snobberies. No matter how on the money something they may have written is, writers I do not think well of I do not quote. Nor will I quote, for obvious reasons, those who write badly; here poor John Dewey, by all accounts an admirable man, gets short shrift. Since I mentioned idiosyncrasies, I may as well confess that I would rather not quote writers who have a middle initial in their names: "As Loren M. Singer put it . . ." is not likely to appear in my pages. As for snobbery, the act of quotation has its own little fashions. Just now highly quotable writers, at any rate among academics, include Wittgenstein, Foucault, Clifford Geertz. Quotation follows intellectual fashion, as form is said to follow function. Stephen Potter, in *Lifemanship,* notes that in 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, Federico García Lorca was hot on the quotation market. In the same book, Potter instructs students of lifemanship (a variation on one-upmanship) that "easily the most O.K. [names to mention or quote] for 1945–50 are Rilke and Kafka." The general gambit of mentioning and quoting O.K. authors Potter calls "Rilking." Rilke is still pretty much O.K., though, being largely ignorant of German poetry, I cannot say that, in a life filled with rilking, I have ever specifically rilked by quoting Rilke himself, though I gather that there is still plenty of time, for it was Rilke who, in *Letters to a Young Poet,* wrote: "The future enters into us, in order to transform itself in us, long before it happens."

As for my own personal taste in quotations, I tend to avoid the fashionable (perhaps out of reverse snobbery, though what is in fashion just now does not much interest me), to shun the highly abstract, and to go in for flat, commonsensical statements by writers with rock-solid reputations. My notion of a quotational good time is T. S. Eliot on the best way to become a literary critic: "There is no method but to be very intelligent." Even better is this from Chekhov: "There are a great many opinions in this world, and a good half of them are professed by people who have never been in trouble." That seems to me smart and true and wise, a sentiment taught by experience, tempered by sympathy, and triggered by impatience with foolishness. I wish I had thought to say it myself, but since I didn't, the least I can do is quote it approvingly and thus align myself with that smallest of minority groups, the party of good sense.

Quotations, especially those that come in the form of aphorisms, are wisdom inspissated. Every aphorism, it has been said, is a condensed essay, and the aphoristic writers are of course the most quotable. As a quotatious writer, I like it when into each of my own essays a little aphorism does fall. While writing this essay, for example, I have also been reading Tom Wolfe's best-selling new novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities,* about which I have been asked to write. In going through one of my old notebooks of quotations (one marked "begun 11/2/73"), I discovered that I wrote out the following sentence from Joseph Conrad's story "Prince Roman": "It is

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only to vain men that all is vanity; and all is deception only to those who have never been sincere with themselves." An apt quotation can light up a mind; it also inevitably finds its place in some conversation or piece of writing. Conrad's interestingly aphoristic sentence will probably serve as an epigraph to what I eventually write about Tom Wolfe's novel; and it may well contain the key to what it is about the novel that makes me uneasy. Thus, to suggestive literary minds, an apt quotation can be a powerful lubricant.

When I first acquired the habit of quotation, part of the motive behind it must have been intellectual display—or, less euphemistically, simple showing off. In quoting one is, after all, proclaiming that one reads widely; and one is also suggesting into the bargain that one reads carefully and retains much of what one has read. If I was showing off, I cannot say that it did me much good. When young I never met and swept away any beautiful women through my powers of quotation—whispering sweet Valérys in their ears. Nor, my guess is, have I won friends and influenced people through my quotations. For every person who admires the quotatious their small skill for being able to call up old reading matter, three other people are likely to find them pretentious in the extreme.

I would gladly have accepted "pretentious in the extreme" one night when I appeared on a radio talk show in Chicago, but I am fairly certain that the meter went well beyond "pompous ass." We were a small group of writers, each come to peddle his book over the air. The man whose show it was began by asking me what I thought it took to be a writer. Clearly, he had come to the right man. I got out of the blocks fast by saying that Hemingway thought the first requisite of the writer was "an unhappy childhood"; I gave him a little James; I popped in a Tolstoy; at no extra charge, I added that Byron said, "Who would write, who had anything better to do?" For three or four minutes I was a Gatling gun of citation; quotation marks were flying around the studio like shrapnel. A woman named Liz Carpenter, white-haired and a Texan who had written a book about being social secretary to Lady Bird Johnson when Lyndon Johnson was president, spoke next. "Mr. Aristides is very learned and all," she said, in a cheerful Southern drawl, "and I was fascinated by everything he had to say. But I just happen to have finished a book about working with my friend Lady Bird Johnson in the White House, and I'll tell you what, you want to be a writer, honey, first thing you need is a real comfortable chair."

That happened roughly seventeen years ago. You might think it would have taught me a lesson. Let me assure you that it did not. The Gatling gun has fired away many a time since; it has, alas, a hair trigger. Anything can set it off. The other day someone mentioned to me, with a touch of chagrin, that his work was not known outside a small academic circle. I replied that I had recently read that Virgil Thomson once said, "When I find myself among those who don't know my name, I know I'm in the real world." I could have added that Lincoln Kirstein once remarked of Virgil Thomson's profound good sense that "he undazzled me," but I thought that more than one quotation on the subject was pushing it. I mean, as Isaac Bashevis Singer has one of his characters say, "one can have too much even of *kreplach*." As you see, once one begins all this quoting, stopping, for the truly quotatious, is a real problem. "Ah, that is no problem," an old Chinese saying has it, "that is impossible."

I suppose the argument could be made that those who quote abundantly are really living off the wisdom of others. Quoting, after all, is not the same as thinking. Once upon a time it was, however, a badge of learning. Carlo Marsuppini, a youngish humanist and friend of Cosimo de' Medici, was thought tremendously learned because, in the course of a single lecture, he was apparently able to work in quotations from every known Greek and Latin writer. Pope Leo X, another of the Medicis and a most bookish man, could quote lengthy passages from his most beloved authors. In the sixteenth century the arguments of lawyers and the decisions of magistrates were often studded with classical references. (In nineteenth-century America, lawyers were expected to be handy with a quotation from Cicero, and a library of classics was part of the furniture in many a legal office.) On his deathbed, Etienne de La Boétie, the dear friend of Montaigne, quoted Catullus, though letting your last words be someone else's may be rather further than even the most quotatious among us is willing to go.

Montaigne, whom I myself like to quote every chance I get, himself had a hardy appe-

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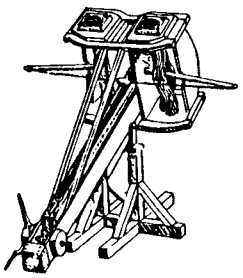

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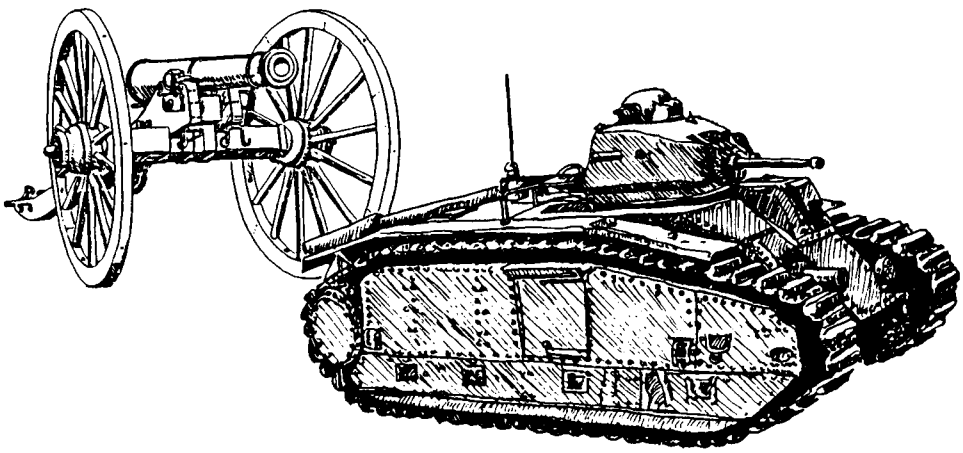

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tite for quotation. In the book-lined study in his famous tower, to which he retreated after his retirement from public life, he had arranged to have written out along the beams of the ceiling some fifty-odd quotations in Greek and Latin, many of them, Montaigne's fine biographer Donald M. Frame reports, emphasizing the ignorance and fragility of man. Included among them was Terence's famous remark, "I am a man; I consider nothing human foreign to me." Not much was, either, and certainly not books written in foreign tongues. Montaigne, in his essays, quoted freely from Aristotle and Plato, Ovid and Horace, and anyone else whom he needed to make his point. Montaigne believed, as Professor Frame puts it, that "what we learn we must digest and make our own . . . ," and in Montaigne's case one feels that those authors he quotes are truly in his blood. Still, late in life, he regretted, as Professor Frame writes, "having been persuaded to quote as freely as he has; his own preference would have been to speak only in his own words." Yet Donald Frame closes his own book on Montaigne with a quotation from Montaigne—"A generous heart should not belie its thoughts; it wants to reveal itself even to its inmost depths. There everything is good, or at least everything is human"—and it seems perfectly appropriate that he do so.

I am rather sorry to learn that Montaigne regretted having been so quotatious in his essays. I myself love to quote Montaigne; if I were a black teenager, I might even go so far as to say, when it comes to quotation, "That Montaigne, man, he my main man." I enjoy quoting Montaigne and the other writers I admire not because I do not think that I have anything fresh to say on my own, but because they have said so many impressive things that it would be a shame not to repeat them from time to time. Sometimes, too, it happens that someone has said something long before you have come upon the scene that so perfectly fits your own feelings that you cannot resist quoting it, even to yourself. I, for example, often have occasion to enter an office that, for complicated reasons too boring to go into here, brings out the aggressor, even the bully, in me. I know well enough what causes these feelings, but I have never quite been able to describe them until, in a not very good book about Gilbert and Sullivan, I discovered that W. S. Gilbert had a strong distaste for churchmen and particularly for curates, whom he found dreary and pusillanimous. One day Gilbert found himself in a small town where a church conference was meeting, and when asked how he felt about being among so many curates, he replied, "I feel like a lion in a den of Daniels." Well, that is precisely how I feel upon entering this office, and each time I do so, I turn the handle and mutter, "a lion entering a den of Daniels. Exactly." It is, somehow, a great comfort to me.

Yet the older, the more refined one's taste becomes, the fewer the people one takes pleasure in quoting. For one thing, prejudice sets in. I prefer not to quote any psychologist beneath the intellectual stature of Freud or Jung. I once thought it very posh to quote anyone associated with the Bloomsbury group, the more obscure the man or woman the better. Now I steer clear of those folks, though I grant you that Virginia Woolf said many penetrating things, and her husband Leonard deserved, if such an award were given, the Nobel Prize for Marriage. For another, one hesitates to quote things already too often quoted; hence my earlier (and perhaps too extreme) prohibition against Tocqueville. While a good quotation, unlike a metaphor, cannot be original, it ought, like a metaphor, to be fresh at least in the sense that one's readers are unlikely to have seen it before. In this line of work, one must never worry about being too arcane or, if the need arises, about availing oneself of foreign languages and phrases. *Et nunc erudimini.*

The possibilities for quotation are further limited by the fact that one feels one should not quote approvingly writers one believes less intelligent or amusing than oneself—and, with the usual abnormal increase in a writer's vanity as he grows older, this can narrow the field dramatically. It can result in one's being able to quote, among contemporaries, only oneself. Now everyone knows that to quote oneself is seriously to violate good taste. But, then, wasn't it Alfred Jarry who said: "Screw good taste"? (A fine instance, do you not agree, of allowing a quotation to do a writer's dirty work for him.) Matthew Arnold remarked upon "the proverbial and ferocious vanity of authors and poets." Matt, babes, you don't know the half of it. Stick around.

I find it difficult to resist quoting myself, and every so often in my notebooks I discover an observation upon humankind or what I

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take to be a witty comment written out with my own name or initials written under it. On a few occasions I have smuggled some of these into my published writing, assigning them to that charming rogue who goes by the name of A. Wag, as in, "The chief contributors to *The New York Review of Books*, as a wag once put it, seem to be mad dogs and Englishmen." (A further refinement in the annals of authorly vanity: here I am quoting myself quoting myself; and they say that there is nothing new in the world.) Other examples of my notebook brilliance I have thus far had to keep between spiral-bound covers. There I noted, for example, asking a young writer what his parents did, and when he reported that his mother was a housewife and a hypochondriac, I replied, "Ah, two full-time jobs." Upon finishing a novel by William Maxwell, I jotted down in my notebook, "I greatly admire William Maxwell's fiction, except that he tends to anthropomorphize children." The other day I was talking with a friend about a slyly ambitious colleague of ours, and I found myself saying, "I fear he is not the simple two-faced young man he at first appears." My friend rejoined that he was certain one day to see that remark turn up in my writing. I hope he finds it as amusing the second time around.

A man extremely fond of quoting himself was the late Oscar Levant. Everything about Levant was extreme, apparently, including his exhibitionism about his own illnesses, which he liked to chronicle in great detail in his radio and television appearances and in his books. He was a man who proved he wasn't a hypochrondriac by dying in 1972 at the age of sixty-six, though to hear him tell it he was already the late Oscar Levant by 1950. A professional wit, whose specialty was in giving utterance to the outrageous, Levant's books—*The Unimportance of Being Oscar*, *The Memoirs of an Amnesiac*, *A Smattering of Ignorance*—are sample cases of undisguised self-quotation. A characteristic instance is when a Broadway playwright named Phil Yordan appeared on Levant's television talk show and asked if Levant wanted to hear about his, the playwright's, failures. Levant replied, "No, your successes are depressing enough." Gertrude Stein, Levant notes in *The Memoirs of an Amnesiac*, once wrote the following stage instructions for one of her plays: "Witty remarks are made offstage." Of course Levant, like many another quotatious type, can bear to leave nothing witty offstage; and he is, moreover, a great appreciator of the wit of others, even when it is at his own expense. Of the many stories he tells of which he is the butt, my own favorite is that of his meeting with Greta Garbo, whom his friend S. N. Behrman had told beforehand of his, Oscar Levant's, legendary wit. When introduced to Garbo, however, Levant was so shaken by her fame and glamour that he became shy and, as he tells it, "stammered stupidly, 'Sorry, I didn't get the name.' " Garbo, turning to S. N. Behrman, announced, "It is better he remain a legend." I should say that a man who can tell a story like that ought to be permitted to quote himself whenever he wishes.

Along with quoting yourself, there is always the prospect of being quoted by others, which can be very nice, and even rather thrilling to someone who is himself highly quotatious. Being quoted with mischievous intent, though, can drive one bonkers and beyond. I have more than once been choked on the three dots of an enemy's ellipsis, hoisted on the petard of partial quotation, garroted by simple misquotation. Of course, it doesn't take an enemy to botch a quotation. Anyone who has ever edited a magazine or written a book with many quotations in it will be able to testify to the fact that one of the most difficult chores known to writers is to get a quotation copied out correctly. Lady Diana Cooper reports that "Lord Ribblesdale . . . told me, when I was too young to believe him, that it was gentlemanly to get one's quotations very slightly wrong. In that way one unprigged oneself and allowed the company to correct one." Getting one's quotations very slightly wrong is not a major problem for most of us who write; to be able to get them only very slightly wrong might even be considered something of an achievement. Now that I stare at it a bit, I have suddenly become worried lest I miscopied my quotation from Lady Diana Cooper.

Accuracy in quotation is not a subject I prefer to dwell on. Not only am I one of those people who are never quite certain whether it is fences or their absence that makes good neighbors, but in my notebooks I frequently mark down items without noting whence they derive. In one of these notebooks, for example, I have written down the line "Every room has its gloom," under which I wrote, "Gertrude Stein, attributed to Shorty Lazar." But

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who is Shorty Lazar? And where, exactly, did Frederick Rolfe, the infamous Baron Corvo, use the phrase "infinitives split to the midriff," which appears in the same notebook? Not, I am sure, in the same place that Noël Coward remarked (I am quoting from the same notebook), "It has strengthened me in my decision not to become a nun."

Although I do not like to say it, my sense is that truly first-rate minds—with such rare exceptions as Montaigne and William Hazlitt, another quotatious writer—do not go in much for quotation. Like those powerful business executives who do not have ulcers but instead give them to others, truly first-rate minds do not quote but instead furnish quotable material for others. At the end of an evening, after all, Samuel Johnson did not scurry home to copy down everything that James Boswell had said. Tolstoy, near as I can recall, quoted rarely, and then chiefly from the New Testament. Goethe did not quote abundantly; nor, to drop to a smaller but no less original figure, did Max Beerbohm. Such writers never felt the need to call on the authority of others to reinforce their own. "I may be old-fashioned," Beerbohm once said, "but I am right."

I, on the other hand, feel the need of all the help I can get. When I am attempting to make an argument, I prefer to bring along Aristotle, Cardinal Newman, Matthew Arnold, George Orwell. So you believe that income can be fairly redistributed in a few decades if people will only listen to reason. Go ahead, George, tell him what we think of that: "You have to be a member of the intelligentsia to believe things like that—no ordinary man could be such a fool." When I set out to amuse, I prefer to bring along Evelyn Waugh, H. L. Mencken, A. J. Liebling, Karl Kraus. So you would like to know what I think of much of the literature being produced today? Go ahead, Karl, tell him what we think of it: "Today's literature is prescriptions written by patients." Thanks, boys.

Yet my penchant for quotation runs deeper than the uses I find for it in supplying authority and amusement for my own conversation and prose. I spend something like a third of the hours I am awake reading, and when I read something really striking I feel the need to copy it in my own notebook: first, because I admire it; second, because I hope that copying it will help me to remember it; third, because copying it out, in some vague way that I do not wholly understand, gives me partial possession of it. When the ballet critic Edwin Denby writes that intelligence in a dancer "is shown by how interesting to look at she can make her body the whole time she is on the stage," I feel that this is a complex point so cleanly made that I must copy it down. It isn't enough that I own *Looking at the Dance*, Denby's book, in which I read it. I want it in my own notebook, too, for reasons I am not prepared to defend.

This may be quite nuts, but it is nice to know that I am not alone in my nuttiness. In E. M. Forster's *Commonplace Book* (published last year by Stanford University Press), after Forster has copied out what looks to be roughly a four-hundred-word passage from *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* on the coronation of Justin, he notes: "—Copied from Gibbon's Decline and Fall, ch 45 on August 17, 1962 for various reasons: partly stylistic; partly in homage; partly because I am just back from Lombardy and wanted to read something of the people who gave it its name." A man in his eighties taking the time to write out four hundred or so words in a notebook nobody beside himself was intended to see—a little crazy, no? Not to me; I understand it completely.

Even in "the valley of the shadow of books," to quote a phrase of George Gissing, we quotatious folk are a bit odd, to put it gently. Few things delight us quite so much as to be able to insert that Plato said this, Pascal said that, Bagehot said the other. To be able to break, in Henry James's words, one's own "fruitless fidget of composition" with a fine line from, say, Hazlitt ("It is utterly impossible to persuade an Editor that he is a nobody," for example), lightens our load. We who are quotatious are never truly alone, but always hear the cheerful flow of remarks made by dead writers so much more intelligent than we. It may well be that tuning into this flow is as close to wisdom as those of us who are quotatious are likely to get. "The wise only possess ideas," wrote Coleridge, "the greater part of mankind are possessed by them." But, I beg of you, please don't quote me quoting Coleridge on that.

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The Stakes in Anthropology

ERNEST GELLNER

THE BOUNDARIES OF DISCIPLINES are dictated not by logic but by problems, opportunities, accidents. The idea of anthropology is rooted not so much in the distinctiveness of man as in its denial. As long as man stood outside nature, his special status exempted him from ordinary inquiry. It was his demotion to an ordinary, if distinguished, member of nature which made it inevitable that something like anthropology should arise.

Both anthropology and sociology originally found their more immediate inspiration in an evolutionary or Jacob's Ladder vision of human societies, the idea of Progress. Social forms were seen as located along some great Chain of Being, which eventually leads to a this-worldly salvation by this-worldly means. But there the resemblance ends. Sociology was rooted in a primarily historical evolutionism, in the perception, by the generation of Condorcet and Hegel, that human history is a story of cumulative change, and in the hope that the pattern of this change was the key to the meaning of life. History was to reveal the inner potential and destiny of human society. By contrast, the evolutionism that somewhat later, around the middle of the nineteenth century, gave birth to anthropology, was markedly biological, and came to be much influenced by Darwin.

Anthropology was born of the desire to explore early or "primitive" social forms, in the hope of tracing the links between contemporary man and the founding ancestors of humanity. The story becomes complicated by the occurrence, during the third decade of this century, of the great Malinowskian Revolution. Bronislaw Malinowski replaced James Frazer as the paradigmatic anthropologist, though their physical deaths in the 1940s occurred in the course of two successive years, only narrowly permitting Bronislaw to comment on Frazer's death and significance, and thereby obliquely on his own. Malinowski retained the implicit definition of anthropology as the study of simpler societies, but he proscribed, very effectively, the use of the material gathered by this inquiry for the invention of alleged evolutionary lines of development. This was castigated as "speculative history."

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Frazer had been an evolutionist magpie, gathering a rich harvest of ethnographic tidbits from here, there, and everywhere. They were torn out of context, and used for the painting of a grand canvas of the evolution of the human mind. Malinowski inverted this on both counts: he insisted on the use, and indeed on the securing, of ethnographic data *in context,* and on the use of a form of explanation which related the data to one another within the unity of a single society or to human needs, rather than to some evolutionary sequence. This is "Functionalism." The Malinowskian Revolution dominated the British Empire and some other lands of what might be called the Malinowskian Sterling Zone; he influenced, but did not dominate, the erstwhile North American colonies.

The Malinowskian empire survived the political one of which it had been a kind of ethnographic shadow. Lands no longer recognizing the authority of the Crown in political matters might well hesitate to defy the Royal Anthropological Institute on anthropological ones. Some rulers of new countries, such as Kenyatta and Busia, possessed much valued anthropological qualifications. Nkrumah, in the days when he was still trying to make it as an intellectual, without yet possessing the advantage of being a dictator, presented Audrey Richards, one of the leading first-generation Malinowskians and as it were Companions of the Prophet, with a pair of nylon stockings. This happened during the immediate post-war years when nylons were still a much-sought-after rarity. It must be added, however, that Nkrumah also behaved in a similarly ingratiating manner to British philosophers.

Malinowski was very much a product of the intellectually turbulent last years of the Hapsburg Empire. In this he resembled Hayek, Popper, and Wittgenstein, who like him had a great influence on Anglophone thought. Roughly speaking, the Hapsburg Empire was torn between the cosmopolitan liberalism of the higher bourgeoisie and the nationalist and socialist leaning of the ethnic groups, including the German speakers. The philosophical expression of the former interest was the ideal of an Open Society, individualist and cosmopolitan, an idea elaborated and made famous by Popper. The latter interest expressed itself largely in the romanticism of *Gemeinschaft,* of a closed community suffused by intimate effective relations, and delimited by an idiosyncratic culture which sustained those relations and endowed them with rich symbolic expression. It found its sacrament in the village green and festival, not in the free market, whether of goods or ideas. Hayek and Popper of course voted for *Gesellschaft,* or the Open Society.

Wittgenstein in his so-called mature work switched to a cult of *Gemeinschaft,* in the very curious guise of a theory of language and philosophy. In a coded—but not very elaborately coded—form it also

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contained a theory of society. In his youth Wittgenstein had elaborated the specifications of a kind of universal language, which, being universal, naturally could not be the medium or emblem of any one village green or totem: it could only be the real idiom of a universal *Gesellschaft*, whose members were only concerned with factual assertion and logical form and would have had no means of expressing any cultural idiosyncrasy. In his later, or "mature" philosophy, it was capable of virtually nothing else. Wittgenstein's later view of language was such as could only link each language to an intimate and closed *Gemeinschaft*. Language was, and would only be, a set of multi-purpose customs enmeshed in an inevitably idiosyncratic "form of life"—cultures. *Gemeinschaft* thereby, by immediate implication, became the only possible form of society, and the possibility of anything else was excluded. The closed community carried meanings, and the meanings sustained it. Meaning was *only* possible in community, and it alone made community possible. Cartesian opting out and transcendence of social bounds, by private and independent thought, was declared impossible. The aspiration for something different, for a *Gemeinschaft*-transcending language, Wittgenstein declared to be pathological, and he supposed, contrary to all evidence, that his own philosophical method could and would cure any such strivings. A language tied to a closed community and eschewing all aspiration to transcendence thereby became the norm of intellectual health. Those who think otherwise are diseased, and he, Wittgenstein, was going to cure them. If you believe that, you'll believe anything.

Wittgenstein was most unusual in that he attributed the drive to universalism, to bloodless cosmopolitanism as some other Romantics would have said, not to French cultural imperialism or British capitalism or a Jewish conspiracy—these being popular candidates for the role—but to the alleged seductiveness of formal logic and the theory of sets. Thus, Wittgenstein bestowed on *Gemeinschaft* a strange new enemy, and endowed it with a bizarre new vindication. This gave his position a certain freshness that it would otherwise have lacked, for it would have been but a repeat performance of an old Romanticism, and this gave him his appeal, in the first generation to philosophers, and in the second, to anthropologists.

Malinowski came from a background which was in many ways similar to that of the Viennese, with which it in any case overlapped. Wittgenstein's musings about how the language of *Gemeinschaft* works, preposterous though they are when applied to *our* world and language, are in fact rather suggestive anthropologically. Malinowski had a far better appreciation of the respective roles of context-bound and context-free discourse: in their overall positions, Malinowski was the better

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philosopher, and Wittgenstein the better anthropologist. It is when Wittgenstein credits modern thought and language with features that can plausibly be attributed to the primitive, *and* believes, absurdly, that this provides the "dissolution" of our problems, that he represents a kind of infantile regression of philosophy.

Malinowski was even more original than Wittgenstein in the use he made of the elements available in this background. He re-combined, in a radically new way, the elements that had figured in the debate between liberals and romantics. The liberals had been cosmopolitan: they liked to see one humanity, actually or potentially rational, in all times and places. The romantics valued cultural diversity, both in time and space. They gloried not only in the diversity of cultures, but also in the diversity of periods. They cultivated a fine sense of history, of both continuity and change, and above all of slow, meaningful change. For them, the sense of slow organic growth complemented the recognition of the functional interdependence of institutions (not that they used such language), as it had done for Edmund Burke.

Malinowski reshuffled these cards. He retained the romantic stress on cultural diversity in space, but not in time. He repudiated the romanticization of history. Functional interdependence was credited to synchronic institutions, but not to successive ones. Malinowski delighted in the view that history was but a form of myth, serving contemporary ends, like other institutions for that matter. His experience of the rival nationalisms of the Hapsburg Empire gave him plenty of support for such a view. In his anthropology, beliefs about the past were to be seen as "charters" of current practices. This also constituted an ideal methodological principle for the study of simpler societies, devoid as they were of reliable, or any, records. It enabled him to replace the pursuit of past "survivals" by the search for contemporary *functions*. This made it possible for him to overturn Frazerian anthropology at both its central points: in its pursuit of an overall historic scheme and in its use of context-free evidence. It also suited him politically; he could remain a cultural nationalist or particularist, *and* a political internationalist, unsusceptible to the historical rhetoric of nationalism. Notwithstanding relatively minor later influences—structuralism and its obscure later avatars, or a belated, tired, largely Parisian Marxism—social anthropology of the still extensive intellectual sterling zone remains recognizably the same subject as the one set up by Malinowski.

Initially, anthropology had been defined in terms of its concern with the primitive. This concern in Malinowski's time engendered a certain method and style, both of inquiry and explanation: a tendency towards the stress on fieldwork, on context, on the perception of synchronic inter-connections. But once such a style is institutionalized, codified,

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and endowed with a rationale, as it emphatically was in the case of Malinowski, it acquires a life and autonomy of its own, independent of the concern that had initially brought it into being. It is possible to apply the method in fields other than those of the primitive, and it is possible to invoke justifications for it that are in no way specifically tied to the primitive. For instance, it is possible to be skeptical of the historians' or orientalists' fixation on documents, for reasons quite independent of the absence of writing and documents among primitives. Anthropologists are, in fact, the natural anti-scripturalists of the social sciences.

The best formulation of the general distrust of documents that I know comes from the pen of a man who was not technically an anthropologist or social scientist at all, though his achievements as an investigator are indisputable: the British traitor and Soviet spy Kim Philby. In an autobiography written in Moscow but published in the West—I quote from memory—he notes that it is the naive and inexperienced spy who thinks he has achieved something if he had succeeded in stealing a confidential document from, say, a foreign embassy. The document in itself is worthless. How does one know it was not written by some junior person eager to ingratiate himself with a senior official and aping his supposed view, while the senior hardly bothered to read it? How does one know it was not a move in an internal intrigue, intended to provoke a reaction and lead to the adoption of views quite contrary to those advocated in the document? What *is* valuable is to be able to speak informally and at length with the members of the embassy in question, and to get a real feel for the way they habitually and naturally think. Once that is understood, it becomes easy to interpret even minor and unconfidential signs. Without that understanding, signs, leaks, documents are useless.

It is hard to think of a more convincing, indeed of a more authoritative formulation of the rationale underlying intensive anthropological "participant observation" than this testimonial from a master spy. A strong sense of the superior power of an approach based on participation, and sense of the interdependence of institutions and meanings, may lead anthropologists to define their subject in terms of method rather than substance. Anthropology may nowadays be pulled in different directions by its substantive and methodological definitions. There are still some really primitive societies left, but they are no longer stable. There are still some relatively stable societies, but they are not primitive. So, ironically, anthropologists are liable to be historians of primitive societies, and synchronic, so to speak, immersionist students of developed ones. Those investigating primitives can no longer indulge in the fantasy of the "ethnographic present." They are most liable to indulge in some historical reconstruction, and calling it "fieldwork," thus doing pre-

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cisely what Malinowski proscribed, while using his mystique and language for doing so. Those, on the other hand, who indulge in field research with the explicit purpose of illuminating the past are sufficiently constrained by respect for Malinowskian terminological conventions not to dare call it "anthropology" (though it is *precisely* what anthropology originally was). They have to call it "ethno-archaeology" instead.

There are others still who seek to define and practice anthropology neither in terms of primitives, nor in terms of field methods, but in terms of the notions of culture and meaning. The original concern of anthropology with culturally very distant, "primitive" societies naturally impelled anthropologists into a preoccupation with the problem of interpreting very alien ideas and mentalities. Handling this problem, like that of kinship, is one of their professional specialities. So, a rather fashionable trend in the subject is inclined to turn the notion of culture, and the interpretation of cultures, into its center of gravity. The savage has no monopoly of alien meanings: if decoding or conveying such significations, unraveling the systems that engender them, is our particular skill, then there is much left for us to do, even if savages become scarce. One is given to understand that the notion of cultural differences and their overcoming is fraught with the most daunting yet rewarding difficulties. The problems of grasping an alien culture, a system of concepts different from one's own, are so great that the achievement of any success is sufficient to define a field of inquiry. This inquiry must also be judged by its own standards.

In this sphere, it is my impression that the situation in America is rather special and liable to take on extreme forms. America was born modern; it did not have to achieve modernity, nor did it have modernity thrust upon it. It has, at most, a rather hazy recollection of any ancien régime. As George Santayana and others have noted, America was born of the more extreme elements of what was itself a uniquely individualist and emancipated country. It attained self-consciousness in the Age of Enlightenment, which provided it with a natural and secular idiom for codifying its own vision. These truths we hold to be self-evident. . . .

The American Declaration of Independence is one of the most comic and preposterous documents ever penned. Yet Thomas Jefferson was not, in any technical or ordinary sense, a fool. This, however, did not prevent him and his fellows from affirming something totally absurd—namely, that views which, for 99 percent of mankind, would have been unintelligible, or at best blasphemous, heretical, and subversive, were actually *self-evident.*

What is the explanation of such egregious folly on the part of otherwise perfectly intelligent, sober, responsible, and competent men?

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The explanation is simple. They took their own rather unusual culture so much for granted that they mistook it for the human condition in general. An individualist world in which men are free to choose their own aims, and select their means by reference to efficiency, seemed to them an obvious world, and one in which all men live as of right. What other world could there be?

As it happens, that is not the world in which all men have lived, or within which they live even now. It is on the contrary quite an exceptional world, which emerged at one time on various shores of the Atlantic and adjoining territories, in a manner which is still not fully understood. America has not changed too much in its tendency to take this world for granted, since the days of the Founding Fathers. For instance, political philosophy, during its recent revival, was and is carried out largely in what might be called the Mayflower style. Society and its rules are made up from scratch: the individual thinker is invited to think away his own special attributes and advantages, to strip away his social role and position, and, using his social nakedness as a kind of premise, indeed as a kind of truth-revealing spiritual exercise, enabling him to excogitate what kind of social order he desires and can endorse. The result of this extraordinary experiment is supposed to have some kind of general validity and authority. It is assumed, bizarrely, that the outcome of this exercise, when performed by various people, would be convergent, perhaps even uniquely determined.

For members of most cultures, the experiment would not be remotely intelligible. For those willing and able to carry it out, the result could only be a reformulation, a restatement of their own pervasive cultural assumptions. The experiment can only feed our cultural presuppositions back to us; it cannot conceivably constitute any kind of independent check on them. But this is not in the least apparent to the upholders of this most recent method in social thought. They are, like the Founding Fathers and the author of the Declaration, culture-blind. These truths they hold to be self-evident. . . . America is inclined to culture-blindness because, on the whole, it takes its own luminously individualist culture for granted, and sees it as manifestly obvious.

What happens to a culture-blind person when he finally grasps the idea of culture, when he understands the fact that the systems of meaning within which people live differ radically, and that no single one of them is manifestly unique, self-justifying, universal, self-evident? That, in this sense, *no* truths can be declared to be "self-evident": self-evidence is a shadow of a culture, and cultures vary. Anthropologists are, virtually by definition, recruited from among people who have grasped this. But if their own culture or origin combines culture-blindness with very great confidence, the new notion of cultural alter-

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natives, of diverse and incommensurate systems of meaning, is liable to have a very special potency for them, to be wildly exciting, intoxicating, and utterly vertiginous. It will be addictive and constitute a revelation. It will acquire the same luminous authority as that which previously surrounded the local culture. It will seem endowed with great explanatory power, if not possessed of a saving grace.

There is nothing specially illiberal about protecting people from the effect of intoxicating and possibly harmful drugs, or even in imposing such protection in a discriminatory way—imposing it with special stringency on those known to be specially vulnerable. For instance, I well remember driving across the Navajo Reservation, stopping at a supermarket, and noting that, though in other ways it was simply just another North American supermarket, it differed from the others in that no booze was available. Encounters with drunk Navajos on the highway made it plain that these restrictions impelled young braves to seek firewater outside the reservation, not without difficulties. Coming back drunk, they seemed unable to restart any vehicle which broke down. The point is, given the special susceptibility of Indians to strong liquor, it is deemed legitimate to try to protect them from this danger, at least in some measure.

American Indians may be specially susceptible to strong drink; ordinary Americans, culture-blind by background, are specially vulnerable to the ideas of culture and hermeneutics, to the intoxicating idea that systems of meaning differ profoundly, are justified by their own distinct standards, and are separated from each other by profound gulfs, the crossing of which is an arduous and perhaps even perilous performance. The idea that the world is not simply what it is, but that its general nature is an optional artifact, culturally induced, culturally bound, is exciting and disturbing, notably to a person who has had some difficulty in overcoming an initial resistance and incomprehension. It is liable to turn such a person's head. The result is a certain tendency to an unduly reverential, rather mystical explication of "meanings," in lieu of more ordinary styles of social description and explanation.

Now, I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am not, repeat *not*, advocating a Prohibition of Hermeneutics. I wish to make this absolutely clear. If anyone accuses me of having recommended such a course of action, I shall consult my lawyers with a view to possible prosecution. I do not recommend any legislative action against hermeneutics. I am a liberal person opposed to all unnecessary state limitation of individual liberties. Hermeneutics between consenting adults should not in my view be the object of any statutory restrictions. I know, only too well, what it would entail. Hermeneutic speakeasies would spring up all over the place, smuggled Thick Descriptions would be brought in by the

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lorry-load from Canada by the Mafia, blood and thick meaning would clot in the gutter as rival gangs of semiotic bootleggers slugged it out in a series of bloody shoot-outs and ambushes. Addicts would be subject to blackmail. Consumption of deep meanings and its attendant psychic consequences would in no way diminish, but the criminal world would benefit, and the whole fabric of civil society would be put under severe strain. Never!

No. Hermeneutic Prohibition must be avoided at all costs. But voluntary restraint is quite another matter. It would not encourage criminality, and would in any case be more likely to be effective in the long run. What I am willing and indeed eager to propose is the foundation of a Hermeneutics Anonymous, whose members would provide each other with moral and other support in their struggle with temptation and intoxication. Medical supervision would be made available for the limited and controlled use of hermeneutics for legitimate scholarly and research purposes. I have no difficulty in thinking of the name of a most distinguished academic whose acceptance of a Life Presidency of the association would confer great prestige and authority on it.

It is of course only superficially paradoxical that the American mind should simultaneously be susceptible both to Mayflower philosophizing, the idea that one can set up principles of social justice ex nihilo, the supposition that it is possible to excogitate a universally binding social order from the mind's own resources, unaided by culture, *and* also to the Hermeneutic plague, the reification and fetishism of idiosyncratic and varied Systems of Meaning. It is only the latter tendency that concerns anthropology. Why is it harmful?

Hermeneutics, like patriotism, is not enough. It won't do simply to present oneself as a semiotic bridge-builder between various systems of meaning, over-awed by the magnitude of the task, and inviting the reader to be even more over-awed by one's findings. Societies are endowed with coercive and economic constraints that are not generally reducible to semantic ones. Changes in a political structure can occur so fast that it is absurd to suppose that the meaning system had changed at the same pace. The relative weight of conceptual and other factors is something to be explored in each case, rather than prejudged. Above all, meanings are a problem and not a solution; culture is a shorthand term rather than a real explanation, and it is never logically terminal. All of which is not to deny that a sensitivity to differences in ways of thinking is a good thing.

Hermeneutic intoxication is sometimes accompanied by a certain facile and self-congratulatory relativism. Systems of Meaning are credited not merely with a magical potency and efficacy, but also, each in its

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own zone, with a kind of automatic legitimacy. Such relativism is simply false, a grave mis-description of real anthropological practice. I do not mean simply that it is false in some ultimate philosophical sense (though I believe this to be so); to demonstrate that would, however, be beyond my powers. It is false at a simpler and less ambitious level: whatever anthropologists may say when they talk about their practice out of office hours, when they actually work they are not, and cannot be, relativists. What in fact they do is give an account of a given society, or some of its practices, against the backcloth of *our* world, and not of *its* world. An anthropologist who would explain witchcraft beliefs and practices of a given society by saying, "Well, as a matter of fact, in their country, witchcraft works, like what they say," would simply not pass muster. If relativism genuinely were the practice of anthropology, such an explanation would be not merely possible, but mandatory. In fact, what the anthropologist does do is explain how witchcraft beliefs can function notwithstanding their falsity. This he can do in a number of well-established ways, such as claiming to show that what purports to be an empirical claim is really something quite different, and hence not false, or by showing how the recognition of falsity is evaded.

A brilliant and distinguished representative of the American version of the hermeneutic trend is Clifford Geertz. A good deal can be learned about his attitude from a fairly recent and highly entertaining essay of his entitled "Evans-Pritchard's African Transparencies" (*Raritan,* Fall 1983). A position can perhaps best be understood by seeing what it attacks, and above all, what it attacks with glee.

The object of the attack is the late Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, a leading member of the Malinowskian school (though one who in the end came to detest Malinowski and was detested by him). In a sense, Evans-Pritchard is a strange object of criticism from a hermeneuticist viewpoint, in as far as it would be quite possible to acclaim him as a fellow hermeneuticist, as Mary Douglas did, I think, in her study of him—or at very least, as a hermeneutic fellow traveler. Geertz himself quotes a sentence from Evans-Pritchard's work that could well serve as a motto for hermeneuticism:

> [When] one has fully understood the meanings of all the words of [the natives'] language in all their situations of reference one has finished one's study of the society.

You could hardly put the position more forcefully: when you have understood their concepts, the job is done. There is nothing else.

But Geertz does not write of Evans-Pritchard in a spirit of endorsement, but rather in a spirit of severe if admiring criticism. The occasion

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of the essay is a little-known article by Evans-Pritchard published in 1973, the last year of his life. It is concerned with some of his wartime experiences and is entitled "Operations on the Akobo and Gila Rivers, 1940–41" (*The Army Quarterly*, 1973). Both the extensive quotations from Evans-Pritchard, and Geertz's comments on them, are exceedingly entertaining.

Geertz's central point is that Evans-Pritchard's mock-modest, seemingly lighthearted, deadpan account of his own endurance and bravery on the Sudanese-Ethiopian border, acting as a kind of mini T. E. Lawrence, and disrupting numerically far superior enemy forces, at the head of a motley and undisciplined band of Anuak tribesmen, is somehow all of a piece with his formal academic anthropology. Evans-Pritchard's witty and deceptively low-key boasting about his own war performance, Geertz is suggesting, and his accounts of Nuer, Azande, and Bedouin social structure and ideology suffer from the very same defects, and are rooted in the same deep traits. Geertz suggests that Evans-Pritchard's tale should not be swallowed whole. I have no access to evidence about what really happened in 1940–41, but I can only say that anthropologists are often uncharitable if not malicious about each other: had Evans-Pritchard been caught out in exaggeration, one would quite probably have heard of it. I have heard stories of that kind about other anthropologists, but none has reached me about Evans-Pritchard; members of the Africanist network seemed to admire his powers of physical endurance. But Evans-Pritchard's war record is not really to our purpose: the belated conferment of a medal is not on the agenda. What is at issue is his anthropological style, and its weaknesses, as corroborated by his reminiscences. What are they?

He wrote clearly. He thought clearly. He was a fully paid-up member of an Imperial race and class (close to the End of Empire, but no matter). The clarity of his style and thought, and the imperial attitude, were, Geertz argues, facets of the same coin:

> This easy certitude of perception is a difficult thing to bring off rhetorically, especially when one is dealing . . . with precisely the sort of materials that most gravely challenge it.
>
> . . . The so-called British school of social anthropology . . . is held together far more by this way of going about things in prose than . . . by any sort of consensual theory or settled method. . . .
>
> There is the suppression of any sign of the struggle with words. Everything that is said is clearly said, without fuss. . . .
>
> The main effect, and the main intent, of this . . . ethnography is to demonstrate that the established frames of social perception, those upon which we ourselves instinctively rely, are fully adequate. . . .
>
> This bringing of Africans into a world conceived in deeply English terms, and confirming thereby the dominion of those terms, must . . . not be misunderstood.

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It is not ethnocentric . . . it is not "they are just like us" . . . [but] that their differences from us, however dramatic, do not, finally, count for much.

What this final and crucial quote amounts to is that Evans-Pritchard was, after all, ethnocentric, though only at a very deep level. He represented a conceptual imperialism, the domination of the world by the lucid levelheaded tone of educated Englishmen.

But the world is not to be so dominated. All those Africans, Geertz implies, are different in a deeper sense than Evans-Pritchard allows. They cannot really be brought "into a world conceived in deeply English terms . . . confirming thereby the dominion of those terms." This kind of intelligibility, and this kind of dominion, have now rightly gone with the wind, and are superseded.

By what? A new race, it would seem, of anthropological Hamlets, with a finer sense of the culturally alien, no longer propelled by an imperial arrogance into supposing that in the end all men can be suborned by the categories of the dominators, no longer given to thinking that, in Geertz's words, "even the strange is more interesting and amusing than it is disturbing or dangerous. It bends our categories, it does not break them."

These new anthropological Hamlets are so sensitive that evidently their categories are not just bent, but broken, good and proper. You need to have your categories broken to know just how much it hurts. But the reward comes in the form of transcendent insights of great depth, but this no longer allows the limpid lucidity of the imperialists. These writers genuinely struggle with their material and spurn to hide the marks of conflict. Not for them "the suppression of any sign of struggle with words. Not for them the passion for the simple subject-predicate sentences, unmodified and undecorated. . . ." Geertz does not suggest that Evans-Pritchard was free of inner conflict—he hints at the opposite, quite rightly—but seems to hold it against him that this was not allowed to intrude into his prose. I am a little reminded of Heinrich Heine's comments on German romantic nationalist poets, eager to commemorate the victory of Herman over the Romans in deep forests and swamps: they convey, says Heine, the spirit of place by the use of wooden and soggy verses. It is not obvious to me that, because the world is a diverse, complex, and tortured place, which it is, that only cumbersome and ambiguous sentences can do it justice, and that clarity becomes some kind of intellectual treason. Or as Geertz would have it:

The confidence [of] . . . Evans-Pritchard seems less and less available to many anthropologists. They are confronted by societies part modern, part traditional; by an army of wildly contrasting approaches to description and analysis; and by

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subjects who can (and do) speak for themselves. They are also harassed by grave inner uncertainties, amounting to almost a sort of epistemological hypochondria concerning how one can know that anything one says about other forms of life is as a matter of fact so. This loss of confidence, and the crisis of ethnographic writing that goes with it, is contemporary and due to contemporary development.

It is astonishing that anyone having to cope with all this can bring himself to say anything at all.

What Geertz has done here is interesting. He has added a new twist to the normal hermeneuticist rationale, which previously centered on the existence of self-sustaining idiosyncratic "forms of life" (Wittgenstein's famous phrase). Change and increasing complexity, epistemological doubts, a more symmetrical and interactive relation between anthropologist and subject, are all recruited as additional confirmations of the new style. Geertz has much fun in highlighting how, by a "boomerang" technique, Evans-Pritchard's seemingly artless simplicity reflects back on his own bravery and stoicism. Here a similar technique is deployed for a different end: the style tells us obliquely of the depth and torment of the author's soul.

I can accept neither a murky relativism nor a semiotic mysticism. For one thing, I am none too impressed by the "epistemological hypochondria" (splendid phrase). I have much sympathy for genuine Hamlets and real doubts, but the recent fashions seemed marked less by their apparent skepticism than by their real dogmatism. The argument tends to be: because all knowledge is dubious, being theory-saturated/ethnocentric/paradigm-dominated/interest-linked (please tick your preferred variant and cross out the others, or add your own), etc., therefore the anguish-ridden author, battling with the dragons, can put forward whatever he pleases.

But let me go straight to the heart of the matter. What is really at issue is the denial of relativism, of the doctrine of the logical ultimacy of "forms of life" or cultures. Cultures are not cognitively equal, and the one within which alone anthropology is possible cannot really be denied a special status. The nature and justification of that pre-eminence is a deep and difficult matter. But it springs from something far more important than the arrogance of an imperial class. It is linked to the very possibility of *reason*. The socio-analysis of Evans-Pritchard's style was highly amusing, but this weapon can only too easily be turned in the opposite direction. What is sauce for the imperialist goose is sauce for the relativist gander. Evans-Pritchard's clarity, whether arrogant or not, enables us to assess his theory of state-less politics, because we know precisely what is being asserted. A "hermeneutic" account of a political system leaves us wondering whether we have been offered an explanation of social order, or merely a disruption of its atmosphere.

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All this seems to me of the essence of the anthropological problem situation. But if hermeneutic mysticism or cultural fetishism won't do, and if the old synchronicist style has run out of steam, which way is the subject to go? It seems to me that it must retain the fine sense of concrete social structure that was the hallmark of classical anthropology, while returning to genetic and half-proscribed general questions that had originally inspired the subject. Hermeneutics without genuflection can stay. Let us practice it, like speaking prose, without too much comment. The questions will be concerned with not merely the diversity but also the inequality of belief systems as well as with the great discontinuities of human history; and the inquiry will not prejudge the issue of the relative importance of conceptual and other constraints. It will face this question, not evade it. It will need to consider how both reason and unreason come to be socially incarnate and what can give birth to either.

Sir William Haley

1901–1987

Contributor, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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The Subtender

JEFFREY GREENE

Banks of fog wait in force
until the heat falters in the California valleys.
Then they come.
They beach themselves on the coastal hills.
Erasure begins with the limbs
and the leaves of the shrub oaks,
with the seas of the daytime moon.
Just edges remain, the details suggested.
This is how the shades of afternoon
moved into evening at Año Nuevo.
Strollers gathered at one end of the beach
where the well-intentioned conservationists
shot a sea lion with darts
of anesthesia. In spite of her illness
and the drug, she willed her way
against the traffic of waves.
When she slept and when she washed back,
something of sweetness remained
in her face. The gulls
would come to feed on her.
On another coast entirely

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I am looking at an old subtender,
its gray hull rising above me
from the black water of the channel,
the waves flexing with light.
The hum of generators deep inside
must also run through the bodies
of 18-year-olds who enlisted from all parts
of the country. Some are reading
in the bare light of electric bulbs.
Some are filtering into the city on leave.
Each of us has a place
that is singular in memory
like the subtender at sea.
Black submarines maneuver
on long turns waiting
to attach themselves like loss
to the huge curvature of the hull.

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Gibbon's Historical Imagination

G. W. BOWERSOCK

THE REPUTATION OF EDWARD GIBBON is even more secure now than when he died. In posterity as in life, the historian of the Roman Empire was the antithesis of Dr. Johnson. He had no Boswell but did not need one since he left behind a supremely great masterpiece. Without his biographer, Dr. Johnson would probably be remembered most of all for his dictionary. And important as it is, that is certainly not a work frequently read today. But the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* continues to be reprinted, read, and admired throughout the western world. It is Gibbon's one great triumph, the cause of his fame and at times notoriety.

The *Decline and Fall* is indisputably a work of history, but just as indisputably it is not what is known today as a scholarly resource. Its information is not always exact, nor was it when it appeared. Its author had read widely in the original sources but contributed nothing in the way of scholarly analysis beyond what he found in the studies of scholars. For the facts and problems, a serious reader intent upon research would have to turn elsewhere—in the eighteenth century to the very sources that Gibbon himself used (Tillemont, the Abbé de la Bléterie, Muratori, Pocock, and many more) and in modern times to Mommsen, Syme, the *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*, and the like. The *Decline and Fall* is generally reliable, but that is certainly not why it is read.

Nor again is the vast panorama of history, so often admired and so very rare in historiography, the reason why Gibbon continues to be read. His boldness in composing an account of more than a thousand years of history made him a pioneer in the comparative treatment of Rome, Byzantium, the early Church, and Islam. So comprehensive a vision is as uncommon now as it was in the eighteenth century, and yet few read Gibbon from beginning to end at one time and experience at firsthand his magnificent juxtapositions of culture. Moreover, those who do read the work through discover a far greater optimism as it draws to a close

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than they had been led to expect from the first part of a work entitled *Decline and Fall.* Gibbon's perspective and even his interpretations changed as he moved along during the fifteen years or so of composition. His positive estimate of western civilization in his own day was bound to cast some sunlight on the fallen monuments of ancient Rome, and the genuine alarm and pessimism that arose from his observation of the French Revolution came too late to be reflected in the *Decline and Fall.*

Gibbon's readers do not therefore consult his work in search of references to the facts of ancient history, nor do many of them read it through from beginning to end as they would a novel, a biography, or even a shorter work of history. The *Decline and Fall* is compelling at virtually any point in its long course. It can be read with pleasure; but equally, since it has no complex and interwoven plot, it can be put down at any moment without a feeling of incompleteness. It is always inescapably there, and it is probably fair to say that reading Gibbon is addictive. The more one does it, the more one wants to do it; and the supply gives the impression of being inexhaustible, even though it is not.

It is no secret that Gibbon's magnificent language has long beguiled his readers, but there is far more to Gibbon than a rhetorician. The extraordinary influence of the *Decline and Fall* over some two centuries on creative artists and scholars alike—for many of whom English was not a native language—must obviously be due to something more than felicity of language. Nor, as we have seen, can it be due to a repertoire of facts that could be more easily and accurately found elsewhere. Theodor Mommsen, the greatest historian of ancient Rome in modern times, said to his students in the nineteenth century, as we have recently learned from the sensational discovery of detailed lecture notes, that Edward Gibbon's history was "the most important work that had ever been written on Roman history." These newly discovered lecture notes, prepared by a highly intelligent adult student of Mommsen, reveal that the interpretation of Roman imperial history that he presented showed striking parallels with the interpretation in Gibbon, particularly the comparison of Constantine with Augustus. It is clear that Mommsen's assessment had nothing to do with Gibbon's language or with his facts but with his overall view of imperial history, or what I should prefer to call his historical imagination. When Mommsen won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1902, just a few months before his death, the *Roman History* for which the prize was awarded had been in existence for some fifty years. It was a work begun by the young Mommsen but actually never completed. The fourth volume was to have contained his narrative of the Roman Empire, and it has always been a mystery why he was never able to write it, even though he regularly lectured on the Roman Empire. The

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answer seems to be that he not only stood in awe of his great English predecessor but was afraid of competing with him. Mommsen must have known that he was a better scholar than Gibbon but feared that Gibbon was the better historian.

Elsewhere in nineteenth-century Germany, two other highly cultivated but otherwise very different people were reading Gibbon with equal appreciation. The recently published diaries of Richard Wagner's wife Cosima show that the two of them read Gibbon to one another off and on in the evenings from 1869 to 1876. They always read Gibbon with pleasure, according to Cosima's notes, and marveled several times at the dramatic power of Gibbon's exposition. In 1871 they contemplate a Gibbonian tragedy on Julian the Apostate, and in the next year they admire the conflict of power and character represented by the confrontation of Ambrose and Theodosius. Although the Wagners had a lively appreciation of Gibbon's English style since they read his work in the original and contrasted it favorably to Carlyle's, what impressed them above all was Gibbon's insight into the character of historical figures and his dramatic presentation of their struggles. Once more it is Gibbon's historical imagination that comes to the fore.

In the twentieth century, another reader for whom English was not a native language read Gibbon with close attention. This was the Alexandrian Greek poet Cavafy, whose detailed marginal notes in his copy of the *Decline and Fall* have recently been published. Cavafy read Gibbon with a critical eye, corrects his facts, finds fault at times with his methods, but overall admires the historical vision. As the Wagners find drama in Gibbon, Cavafy finds poetry. Of a scene in Chapter 31 in which a defeated emperor plays the flute in the midst of a crowd of Gothic conquerors, Cavafy wrote in the margin, "The subject for a beautiful sonnet, a sonnet full of sadness such as Verlaine would write, *je suis l'empire à la fin de la décadence.*" Or again, when he reached Chapter 57, Cavafy wrote beside the account of Mahmud the Gaznevide, "still venerable in the East" according to Gibbon, that this tale is the subject of a beautiful poem by Leigh Hunt, and Cavafy explicitly remarks, "The poet acknowledges his indebtedness to Gibbon," as was indeed the case. Cavafy's marginalia in the *Decline and Fall* constitute his own extensive acknowledgment; and several of his poems, notably those on Julian the Apostate, are proof of what he owed to Gibbon's narrative.

If we look at the greatest historian of Rome in the twentieth century, Sir Ronald Syme, we see that Gibbon made as profound an impression upon him as upon Mommsen in the previous century. And, it should be noted, the influence is not stylistic, for of course Syme's unusual style is an English reworking of the inconcinnity of Tacitus. But Syme's perspective—his historical outlook, his historical imagination—is thor-

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oughly Gibbonian. The portrait of Augustus in *The Roman Revolution* owes something to Tacitus and Asinius Pollio but far more to Gibbon in the third chapter of the *Decline and Fall.* The ancient writers had provided hints of a hostile portrait of the first Roman emperor, but it was Gibbon who created that portrait. Syme's indebtedness to his eighteenth-century predecessor even extends beyond the *Decline and Fall.* Taking Gibbon's long and eloquent reply to a serious critic of his two chapters on early Christianity (the so-called *Vindication*) as his model, Syme replied to an equally serious critic at comparable length with similar irony and memorable phrasing. Syme's pamphlet, entitled *The Historia Augusta: A Call for Clarity,* is a Gibbonian vindication of our own time.

Finally, before we try to look at the fundamental components of Gibbon's historical imagination, another twentieth-century writer, very different from Syme and Cavafy, has a small claim on our attention for what is perhaps the most trenchant and brief critical observation on Gibbon to have been made in a long time. John Lahr in his biography of the brilliant comic dramatist Joe Orton reports that one of Orton's literary agents observed that Orton had once produced "a very funny and penetrating piece of literary criticism." This man had asked Orton whether he and his friend Halliwell had read Gibbon, and the reply came back, "What an old queen she is! Send up, send up, send up the whole time." This is obviously not simply a reference to Gibbon's style or to his irony: it is far more than that. It touches upon Gibbon's whole technique of presenting historical personalities and events. That a comic dramatist, in the English tradition of Sheridan and Wilde, should see this quality in Gibbon is as impressive in its way as the comments of Richard Wagner on the dramatic characteristics of the *Decline and Fall.*

Let us, then, try to work out what is so special about Gibbon's historical imagination in the *Decline and Fall,* what makes his work so much more than an aggregate of facts or a treasure of well-turned and quotable sentences. Fortunately for us, Gibbon wrote when he was twenty-five a remarkable assessment of his own character. After acknowledging that his fundamental virtue and generosity were corrupted to some extent by pride, he notes, "Wit I have none. My imagination is rather strong than pleasing, my memory both capacious and retentive. The shining qualities of my understanding are extensiveness and penetration; but I want both quickness and exactness." In her biography of the young Edward Gibbon, Patricia Craddock rightly explains the strictures against wit as no more than Gibbon's failure to aspire to what Samuel Johnson called "good things" in conversation. No one, least of all Gibbon himself, could have doubted his sense of humor and his powerful irony, but equally it is true that no Boswell would have been

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able to compile a volume of aphorisms emitted by Gibbon in social settings. Gibbon talked at length and mellifluously, but he was not a man to reply pungently to someone else's talk. This may have been one of the many reasons that he and Johnson disliked each other.

Gibbon's introspective candor about what he calls wit encourages one to believe that he was equally perceptive in describing his imagination as strong rather than pleasing. Gibbon's writings throughout his career leave a powerful impression, but his early work, such as the aborted history of the Swiss Republics, certainly does not afford such pleasure as the *Decline and Fall* does. No one could question Gibbon's belief that his memory was capacious and retentive: his entire oeuvre proves the point. When he says that the shining qualities of his understanding are extensiveness and penetration, this seems a quite astonishing anticipation of the writer who could encompass more than a thousand years of history with a rich supply of new observations. And when the twenty-five-year-old Gibbon says at the same time that he lacks both quickness and exactness, no working scholar who has studied the *Decline and Fall* could disagree. Gibbon was not a compiler; he was not an industrious researcher. He was, in short, no Le Nain de Tillemont, and that is undoubtedly why he needed to rely on such a scholar.

Gibbon's self-conscious lack of precision is clearly part of his alignment with the *philosophes* against the *érudits* in the debates of eighteenth-century Europe. As a bilingual Englishman whose education and life in a French-speaking environment gives a curious foreignness to much of his work, as J. W. Burrow has recently pointed out in his excellent little synthesis of Gibbon's achievement, Gibbon believed that mere erudition and antiquarian learning were not what really mattered in his time. The philosophic historian should speak to the needs of his age in a form that was as agreeable as it was instructive. In other words, Gibbon warmly espoused the Horatian precept of commingling the *dulce* (or sweet) with the *utile* (or useful). As early as 1758, when the young Gibbon was still living in Lausanne and known to have been studying the date of Horace's *Art of Poetry,* he took time to study the Abbé de la Bléterie's account of the succession of the Roman emperors. In Gibbon's observations, which look forward to views later expressed in his Francophone essay on literature, the young Gibbon, writing in French and already allying himself with the *philosophes,* said of La Bléterie's work, "To bring a spirit of clarity into the shadows of antiquity suffices for the man of letters who wishes to instruct himself; to scatter flowers on the thorns of knowledge is the plan of the wit who seeks only to amuse himself. To unite the useful and the agreeable is all the most demanding reader can ask: let him ask it of M. de la Bléterie without fear."

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This view of history, which is the engine that set his strong imagination in motion, remained with Gibbon throughout his life. In the introductory remarks to the first of the final two volumes of the *Decline and Fall* (in other words, at the beginning of Chapter 48), Gibbon observed that, after he had narrated the history of five centuries of the decline and fall of the Empire, a period of more than eight hundred years still awaited his attention. "Should I persevere in the same course," he wrote, "should I observe the same measure, a prolix and slender thread would be spun through many a volume, nor would the patient reader find an adequate reward of instruction or amusement." Accordingly, since the history to follow was less suited to these twin objectives, Gibbon would compose the narrative in less detail in order to avoid tedium. Annalistic writing as such was utterly contrary to his historical aims. For that final period of his work he justified a summary treatment by observing, "These annals must continue to repeat a tedious and uniform tale of weakness and misery; the natural connection of causes and events would be broken by frequent and hasty transitions, and a minute accumulation of circumstances must destroy the light and effect of those general pictures which compose the use and ornament of a remote history." The observation is exceptionally helpful. We should note the emphasis that Gibbon gives to "light and effect" in "those general pictures which compose the use and ornament of a remote history." Use and ornament remind us once again of *dulce* and *utile*.

In writing, similarly in French, in the *Mémoires Littéraires de la Grande Bretagne*, which Gibbon published for a few years at the end of the 1760s with his friend Deyverdun, Gibbon remarked, with a recognizably continental perspective (and undoubtedly an eye on Montesquieu), "The other nations of Europe had outstripped the English in the progress of history. England possessed poets and philosophers, but she was reproached with having only cold annalists and impassioned declaimers." But Gibbon then goes on to mention two exceptions, and these are the two exceptions that continued to provide contemporary models for his own work as he began the project of the *Decline and Fall*. They were Robertson and Hume. And we should attend carefully to the way in which he chooses to praise these two writers in this early passage in the *Mémoires Littéraires*. "Two great men have silenced this reproach. A Robertson has adorned the annals of his homeland with all the graces of the most vigorous eloquence. A Hume, born to instruct and judge mankind, has carried into history the light of a profound and elegant philosophy." So to annalistic history Robertson brought grace and Hume instruction. It is well known that when the first volume of the *Decline and Fall* appeared it was warmly praised by Hume himself, not long before his death. As for Robertson,

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Gibbon paid him the ultimate tribute—paraphrasing Robertson's own words in what has become probably the most famous passage in the whole of Gibbon's work. In Chapter 3 of the *Decline and Fall,* we read, "If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus." Only eighteenth-century specialists today will know that in Robertson's history of the emperor Charles V, published seven years before the first volume of the *Decline and Fall,* he had written, "If a man were called to fix upon the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most calamitous and afflicted, he would without hesitation name that which elapsed from the death of Theodosius the Great to the establishment of the Lombards in Italy." For Gibbon this resemblance is not plagiarism but homage. He was concerned to explain as forcefully as possible his beginning with the Antonines, and he was following a system of thought, identifying the age of happiest felicity in comparison with the age of greatest misery, that constituted a mechanism for providing both the instruction and the elegance that he sought in his historical writing.

What we might consider plagiarism was of no great concern to Gibbon. He assembled his facts where he could find them, and he tried without undue strain to identify the most reliable purveyors of them. He was well acquainted with many of the great works of classical and late antiquity, and he was prepared within limits to check out sources to which he was referred by his modern authorities. But he had no desire to waste his time in protracted antiquarian research. As he readily acknowledged at the beginning of the chapter in which he proposed to expound theological debates on the incarnation, it was simply just too much trouble to document all that he was about to lay before the general public. He did not hesitate to put his problem directly before his readers: "By what means shall I authenticate this previous enquiry which I have studied to circumscribe and compress?" In other words, he is going to provide a synthesis of what he has read. He then declares:

> If I persist in supporting each fact or reflection by its proper and special evidence, every line would demand a string of testimonies, and every note would swell to a critical dissertation. But the numberless passages of antiquity which I have seen with my own eyes are compiled, digested, and illustrated by Petavius and Leclercq, by Beausobre and Mosheim. I shall be content to fortify my narrative by the names and characters of these respectable guides.

Nowhere does Gibbon make quite so plain his lack of interest in the minutiae of traditional scholarship.

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Attentive readers of the *Decline and Fall* will find many a passage in which Gibbon's paraphrase of ancient authors comes through the text of a modern writer he had consulted rather than from the ancient author directly. In the case of Julian the Apostate, I have myself been able to prove that some of Gibbon's quotations from Ammianus Marcellinus and from Julian himself were in fact directly translated from the French paraphrase of the Abbé de la Bléterie and not from the originals. In the outcry over the notorious fifteenth and sixteenth chapters on the origins of Christianity, one critic, the unfortunate Henry Edwards Davis, B.A., of Balliol College, Oxford, was able to set up in parallel columns a huge series of direct borrowings by Gibbon. And Mr. Davis, of course, categorized these as plagiarisms.

Now Mr. Davis is best known as the helpless target of Gibbon's powerful reply to his critique. The famous *Vindication of Some Passages in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Chapters* is, from start to finish, a vigorous rebuttal of the charges made by Mr. Davis in his very detailed book. We all know the arch beginning of the *Vindication* in which Gibbon observes in apparent bewilderment that Mr. Davis "styles himself a Bachelor of Arts, and a member of Balliol College in the University of Oxford," and we all know that Gibbon in the same work declared, "I cannot profess myself very desirous of Mr. Davis's acquaintance; but if he will take the trouble of calling at my house any afternoon when I am *not* at home, my servant shall show him my library, which he will find tolerably well furnished with the useful authors, ancient as well as modern, ecclesiastical as well as profane, who have *directly* supplied me with the materials of my history."

But these palpable hits should not make us forget that Gibbon felt called upon to write the *Vindication* in the first place. Davis's attack was a genuine threat to the integrity of Gibbon's work. The section on plagiarisms, which runs to dozens of pages, is the most damaging, and yet it is that section to which Gibbon devotes the least space in his reply. Under the rubric of plagiarisms Gibbon simply tells his readers that he should be congratulated for choosing to rely upon the most reputable scholars and in any event can scarcely be expected to waste a great deal of time in looking up material that others have looked up before him. "It would surely be unreasonable," protested Gibbon, "to expect that the historian should peruse enormous volumes, with the uncertain hope of extracting a few interesting lines, or that he should sacrifice whole days to the momentary amusement of his reader. Fortunately for us both, the diligence of ecclesiastical critics has facilitated our enquiries." In other words, there was substance to the charges brought by Davis; and Gibbon knew that, if they went unanswered, they could detract substantially from the readership of his work. His *Vindication* is not so much a reply

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to Davis's charges as a powerful affirmation that these charges simply do not matter. The rhetorical fireworks with which Gibbon destroyed Henry Edwards Davis for all time have tended to make readers forget that he was one of many who attacked Gibbon's fifteenth and sixteenth chapters. Yet it was only this attack that provoked Gibbon to issue a detailed reply, although, to be sure, he took the opportunity in doing so to comment on some other critics as well.

If Gibbon's insouciance about correct scholarly method must be judged blameworthy to some extent, it nonetheless allowed him to exercise his talents as a *philosophe* without exposing the inadequacies he undoubtedly felt as an *érudit*. In his *Vindication*, when he addresses the plagiarisms alleged by Davis, Gibbon says with an almost disarming candor that, if the public should think his two chapters on early Christianity contained materials that are of interest and value, "it is of little moment to whom they properly belong." He then goes on to say, "If my readers are satisfied with the form, the colours, the new arrangement which I have given to the labours of my predecessors, they may perhaps consider me not as a contemptible Thief, but as an honest and industrious Manufacturer, who has fairly procured the raw materials, and worked them up with a laudable degree of skill and success." This is an astonishingly open and unblushing description of Gibbon's perception of himself as a historian for the *grand public*. Scholars provide the raw materials, but he works them up with due attention to form, colors, and arrangement. It is necessarily in the elaboration of the raw materials that Gibbon's historical imagination can assert itself. I have dilated upon Gibbon's rather dismissive view of scholarship because it is evidently the very strength of his imagination that has moved him to prefer form, colors, and arrangement to scholarly precision. The author of the *Vindication* appears, therefore, as very much the same writer as the young man of twenty-five years of age who admitted that he lacked exactness but judged the shining qualities of his understanding to be "extensiveness and penetration."

Gibbon thus treated the raw materials of ancient and medieval history much as a novelist treated the plot line. Many will recall his famous tribute to Fielding in the *Memoirs,* when he declared that "the romance of Tom Jones, that exquisite picture of human manners, will outlive the palace of the Escorial and the imperial eagle of the House of Austria." But Gibbon never dreamt of writing fiction himself. In a famous footnote in the *Decline and Fall* he observed, "The *Cyropaedia* [of Xenophon] is vague and languid: the *Anabasis* is circumstantial and animated. Such is the eternal difference between fiction and truth." Yet Gibbon shaped his truth as if it were fiction, preserving thereby the animation of human history and the art of the novelist. In this sense

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Gibbon could describe himself in the *Vindication* as a Manufacturer.

For Gibbon, the manufacturing process not only included discarding boring material, such as much of the history of the last eight hundred years with which he had to deal. It also required him to flesh out those important episodes on which the ancient tradition was, for his purposes, regrettably inadequate or even altogether silent. Gibbon was, as always, candid about his procedures, and at the beginning of Chapter 10 of the *Decline and Fall* when he approaches the exceptionally ill-documented time of the mid-third century A.D., he declares, "The confusion of the times, and the scarcity of authentic memorials, oppose equal difficulties to this historian, who attempts to preserve a clear and unbroken thread of narration." Yet the period is a pivotal one in the transition from Roman Empire to the early Byzantine age, and Gibbon's problem has been acutely felt by all historians who have followed him. The *Cambridge Ancient History*, for example, turned over the whole period to numismatists because there were more interesting coins from this period than there were texts. Yet Gibbon's solution to the problem of insufficient evidence was simply free invention. Here is the way he describes that solution: "Surrounded with imperfect fragments, always concise, often obscure, and sometimes contradictory, he [the historian] is reduced to collect, to compare, and to conjecture: and though he ought never to place his conjectures in the rank of facts, yet the knowledge of human nature, and of the sure operation of its fierce and unrestrained passions, might, on some occasions, supply the want of historical materials."

And with this justification Gibbon drew from his knowledge of human nature some of the most unforgettable portraits of fierce and unrestrained passion in western literature. His famous description of Augustus, constructed upon a few intimations in Tacitus and so fundamental to Syme's vision of the Roman revolution, is almost entirely invented on the basis of inference. No ancient texts tell us what Gibbon tells us about the character of Augustus:

> The tender respect of Augustus for a free constitution, which he had destroyed, can only be explained by an attentive consideration of the character of that subtle tyrant. A cool head, an unfeeling heart, and a cowardly disposition, prompted him, at the age of nineteen, to assume the mask of hypocrisy, which he never afterwards laid aside. With the same hand, and probably with the same temper, he signed the proscription of Cicero, and the pardon of Cinna. His virtues, and even his vices, were artificial; and according to the various dictates of his interest he was at first the enemy, and at last the father, of the Roman world.

This masterly and compelling portrait—whether true or false, we shall probably never know—not only supplied, in Gibbon's words, "the want of historical materials," it also gave the historian an organizing

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principle for his entire work. As the great narrative moves on across the centuries, Gibbon returns at crucial moments to make a comparison with the founder of the Roman Empire, and he never loses sight of the characterization he provided in the third chapter. We have already observed that Mommsen was profoundly impressed by the parallel that Gibbon drew between Augustus and Constantine, a parallel in which the founder of the Byzantine Empire was represented (as no ancient source ever represented him) as a master of artifice and the author of the second Roman revolution. But Gibbon enhances the dramatic contrast between Augustus and Constantine by emphasizing the rise of the first emperor from tyranny to the fatherhood of humankind and the descent of the founder of Constantinople from heroism to cruelty and dissolution. It obviously served Gibbon's view of the influence and effects of Christianity to observe dissolution after conversion.

Again, many chapters and many hundreds of years later, Augustus is once more brought back to make a comparison with the pathetic Charles IV in the fourteenth century: "If we annihilate the interval of time and space between Augustus and Charles, strong and striking will be the contrast between the two Caesars: the Bohemian who concealed his weakness under the mask of ostentation, and the Roman who disguised his strength under the semblance of modesty." Richard Wagner said to Cosima one evening in July of 1872 that Gibbon had created powerfully dramatic characters in his work. "All the figures are there" for a great drama (*jede Figuren sind schon da*): but "only the dramatists are missing." What Wagner seems to mean is that the memorable characters are presented in splendid tableaux without much interacting with one another, as would be required in an integrated piece for the theater. Just as scholars provided raw material for Gibbon, Gibbon in Wagner's view provided raw material for dramatists.

In addition to creating historical characters out of the wealth of his understanding of human passion, Gibbon was able to develop his narrative still further through the deliberate and sometimes downright startling transposition of materials from one historical period to another. He was more interested in the usefulness of an ancient source for his purpose than he was in historical accuracy. This characteristic of Gibbon's method has been noticed more than once, but it needs to take its place here as another means by which his imagination was given free play. In describing the Persian nobility in Chapter 8 of the *Decline and Fall,* Gibbon pieced together a memorable account from a variety of ancient and modern texts, and his justification for doing so was simply that human nature tended to remain the same and that what was true of the Persians in the fifth century B.C. was likely to be true of the Persians in the third century A.D. In the final footnote to that chapter he says,

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without embarrassment, "From Herodotus, Xenophon, Herodian, Ammianus, Chardin, etc., I have extracted such *probable* accounts of the Persian nobility, as seem either common to every age, or particular to that of the Sassanids." In other words, sources that mention the Sassanids were included in his account of that Persian dynasty, and sources that did not were included because of characteristics common to every age. In a particularly notorious instance that was vigorously censured by Cavafy in his marginalia to Gibbon, a direct quotation from Xenophon's *Anabasis* is included in Gibbon's account of the victory of Galerius over the Persians in the late third century A.D. Again, in Gibbon's description of the Battle of the Golden Horn in 1453, he does not hesitate to avail himself of the testimony of Thucydides, who wrote in the late fifth century B.C. In a footnote to a vivid description of Muhammed II sitting on horseback on the beach, Gibbon calmly acknowledges, "I must confess that I have before my eyes the living picture which Thucydides has drawn of the passions and gestures of the Athenians in the naval engagement in the great harbour of Syracuse." Thus was Gibbon's imagination nourished by the ancient sources but totally unconfined by them.

Yet, despite the great descriptive passages that reflect Gibbon's reading of books and of men, his reconstructions are essentially dramatic or theatrical rather than purely visual. There is very little in the *Decline and Fall* to suggest that Gibbon's aesthetic appreciation contributed much to his visual imagination. His rare allusions to art and architecture are undistinguished. Monuments interest him principally for their symbolism and historical significance, so that when he comes to such discoveries of the eighteenth century as the remains at Palmyra or the palace of Diocletian at Split, he is uncharacteristically speechless. For Palmyra he can only make an admiring but banal reference to the work of Dawkins and Wood, and for the palace at Split he feels obliged to quote directly from Adam's account of the palace. There is no hint of the archaeological discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum that were of such concern to eighteenth-century artists and connoisseurs. But this should perhaps come as no surprise in an author who visited the Naples area when he was on the Grand Tour in 1764—the very tour on which he believed that he was inspired to write the *Decline and Fall*—and never took the trouble to visit Pompeii. It is clear from Gibbon's journals of that year that he tried valiantly to study and observe the artistic masterpieces in the museums of Italy. But most of the observations ring hollow, and his failure to make contact at Rome with Winckelmann and his circle of artists and dealers (whom Boswell met), to say nothing of his disinterest in the archaeology of the age, are incontrovertible evidence that he had no serious interest in art for its own sake.

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But, despite this lack of visual imagination in relation to art or objects, Gibbon was nonetheless as excited by topography as he was by the spectacle of human passion. His description of Constantinople is still one of the best ever written, even though he had never been there. His ability to imagine the layout of the great city on the Bosporus where much of his history took place is staggering, but it was the city as a scene for events that fired his imagination. His description of Poggio sitting on the Capitol amid the ruins of the Temple of Jupiter at the beginning of the final chapter of the *Decline and Fall* is artfully paired with Gibbon's description of himself sitting amid the ruins of the Capitol at the fateful moment in which he is supposed to have conceived the idea of writing the history. In fact, in the description of that memorable moment in the various drafts of his *Memoirs* Gibbon was misled by Poggio's dream of the past into believing that he, like Poggio, was seated by the remains of the Temple of Jupiter, even though he was not. His error was undoubtedly due more to a desire for an artful parallel with which to conclude his work than to a recollection of an error in Nardini, whom he had read many years before. Poggio's reverie did indeed take place on the remains of the Temple of Jupiter; but, when Gibbon went to Rome, the Palazzo Caffarelli had already been built over the remains, and Gibbon was obliged to sit musing by the site of the Temple of Juno (not of Jupiter) where the barefooted friars were singing vespers. But despite inaccuracies, the description of the Capitol stands like the description of Constantinople as a brilliant testimony to Gibbon's use of topography for setting a scene.

His interest in such descriptions was not at all aesthetic. He lavished so much of his talent upon them to provide a suitable stage for great events. Wagner was right in detecting the dramatic quality of Gibbon's historiography. But it was not only the characters who were dramatic: the descriptions were dramatic too. Topography was a kind of a mise-en-scène, a stage set for the momentous events that were to be presented. In recent times it was the distinguished German historian and thinker, Friedrich Meinecke, who in a brief essay on Gibbon accurately defined the theatrical character of Gibbon's historical writing. "Again and again," wrote Meinecke, "one is reminded in his historical work of the theatrical scenes of a classical drama." Meinecke goes on to suggest, probably correctly, that, while the rhetorical brilliance of Gibbon's diction can sometimes become a little tiresome, the theatrical power of his narrative moves the reader forward. We see once again that the greatness of Gibbon's work was apparent to non-Anglophone readers not so much for the brilliant style as for the presentation of the material. And we may recall that this is what Gibbon himself believed to be his greatest achievement in the writing of history. Let us remember, too, that

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from his youthful reading in Lausanne onwards Gibbon was steeped in the classic historical theater of Racine and Corneille. *J'aime le théâtre,* wrote Gibbon in 1764, *mais j'ai peu de goût pour la farce.*

Theodor Mommsen, indisputably the most knowledgeable of German readers of Gibbon, acknowledged, as we saw, the enduring value of the *Decline and Fall* and seems to have felt, even at a distance of a hundred years, a certain competition from its author. Mommsen was far too intelligent not to have recognized that the imagination Gibbon brought to his narrative presupposed a certain arbitrary and superficial handling of the original sources. The young Mommsen, in his Nobel Prize winning *Roman History,* had proved himself a master of historical narrative, but the older Mommsen must have realized increasingly the tension, verging on incompatibility, that arose from giving free rein to historical imagination while attempting to maintain scholarship at the highest level. When Mommsen visited England, his praise of Gibbon was as lavish as it evidently was in the lectures to his students in Berlin, so that it was not unnatural for the Camden Professor of Ancient History at Oxford, Henry Pelham, to invite Mommsen to the celebrations of the hundredth anniversary of Gibbon's death held in London in 1894 or, if he could not attend, to send an appropriate statement. Mommsen sent a letter that was read out by Professor Pelham at the time and widely reported as one of many tributes to the author of the *Decline and Fall.*

Dr. Brian Croke of Australia tracked down the publication of the brief missive that Mommsen sent to Pelham. It is at once a surprising and perceptive document, for it turns out that Mommsen refused to supply a public tribute. In his own excellent English Mommsen wrote as follows:

> I feel immensely honoured by the request you have made to me in the name of the Gibbon committee; but you must excuse me if I cannot accept. I have been obliged to undertake new and very serious tasks for my inscriptions, and it is absolutely impossible for me to leave Berlin this winter. If it were not, I might try to overcome the horror I have always felt for congress-going, and in this instance it would have been compensated by the pleasure of revisiting England and seeing once more my English friends.
>
> As for the paper you want me to write, it is not easy for me to say No; but after long, and too long, consideration, I cannot say Yes. Acknowledging in the highest degree the mastery of an unequalled historian, speaking publicly of him, I should be obliged to limit in a certain way my admiration of his work. He has taught us to combine oriental with occidental lore; and he has infused in history the essence of large doctrine and theology; his "solemn sneer" has put its stamp upon those centuries of civilization rotting and of humanity decaying into civil and ecclesiastical despotism. But his researches are not equal to his great views: he has read up more than a historian should. A first-rate writer, he is not a plodder. This must be said, and will be said; but you understand that such saying would not become this festival, and would come with a bad grace from me.

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So here we have a definitive statement from Mommsen about the unequaled historian. The scholar in Mommsen fueled the rival, and he had at last to fault Gibbon where he could easily be faulted—for scholarly inadequacies. Mommsen is right when he says that Gibbon's researches were not equal to his great views. He is right when he says that Gibbon read up—or, as we should say nowadays, mugged up—more than a historian should. Gibbon did not regularly work at firsthand and with a critical eye. But Mommsen must have known perfectly well that if Gibbon had done the kind of research expected of a thoroughgoing scholar, the great views would in all probability never have taken shape or found expression. This, I suspect, is a paradox that confronted and troubled Mommsen in his old age.

If Gibbon had been the kind of scholarly historian that Mommsen wanted, he would not, indeed he could not, have been the historian that we admire today. He might have been another Tillemont, or even another Hume or Robertson. By recognizing the weaknesses of Gibbon we can see why he was great. Those very weaknesses allowed that strong imagination to run its course, to create the matchless characterizations, the high drama, and the vivid scenes that constitute the *Decline and Fall*. These are all manifestations of a historical imagination that overrides Gibbon's industry and eloquence and makes his work far more than an anthology of memorable quotations. Mommsen's opinion of Gibbon was essentially right; but, if he had rephrased it a little differently, it would by no means have been graceless of him to pronounce it publicly. But had he done this, he would have had to admit that Gibbon's work was not scholarship but something that surpassed scholarship: literature of genius. Without the research of his predecessors, Gibbon could certainly not have undertaken the manufacture of which he spoke in his *Vindication*, but he had neither the desire nor the capacity to do the same kind of research himself. What he did was something much more remarkable. If Mommsen was not prepared to face up to this, it was probably for the same reason that he was never prepared to write the missing volume in his *Roman History*. Although the greatest Roman historian of modern times, Theodor Mommsen could have had no hope of matching Edward Gibbon on the history of the Roman Empire.

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Running the Projector in Reverse

RICHARD BÉZIAT

It's our *deal;*
in fact it is only for this that
the students will even sit still,
nodding conspicuously at inappropriate moments,
pretending to absorb the lesson, secretly
examining the screen for surrealistic potential.
The music swells into the final credits
and thirty heads turn in unison: my cue.
I flip the switch to the rattle of desks
and the flutter of applause, and then, there—
God help us—there they are:

the paratroopers of the 101st Airborne,
miraculously defying Newton's laws, repacking
their chutes midflight before popping back
into the plane;
the hugely disappointed boa constrictor,
laboriously regurgitating the kangaroo rat
that would have lasted him six months;
and the pitiful solitary buffalo,
retrudging his weary mile across the snowy
expanse of Yellowstone—surely the reality version
was punishment enough . . .

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The bell rings, equally startling,
and my thirty warm bodies—good Pavlovians—
explode toward their buses and televisions.
Staying behind, oddly enough, is my biggest problem.
From under his hat he looks me dead in the eye.
"That tree really *scored* on that lumberjack, didn't it?"
I frown my most concerned frown.
"Really. How's that guy gonna make any money
if we keep putting those trees back up?
He's probably got enough problems without that."
My man laughs, remembering. "Yeah . . . well, see ya."

At closing time, still unable to wipe off a stupid grin,
I gently wrap the cord back around a cold
black machine, which has so recently produced
the rarest and most special effect.

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How Many Doors

E. B. DE VITO

What will it take to let you go
from where you were to where you are?
What would it take to make me see
this irreversibility?
Even the slowest backward learner
comes at last to understand
the inevitability of sorrow:

the girl with her dead child in her arms
begging Buddha to make him well
and Buddha, knowing reason to be
impotent pitted against grief,
prescribed a magical remedy:
a millet seed from any house
where death had never entered.

When she had been turned away
from every threshold in the town,
she understood at last
and let go her burden of the dead.

What will it take to let you go
from where you were to where you are?
Will I ever let dead men die,
learn to give way—at least try
to let sleeping dogs—and serpents—lie?

E. B. DE VITO's poems have appeared in *The New Yorker, Saturday Evening Post, Commonweal,* and other magazines.

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Staying Alive

Some Home Truths About Population

WILLIAM PETERSEN

WHOEVER IT IS THAT ARRANGES SUCH MATTERS proclaimed the week of April 20 to be Population Awareness Week. All persons of goodwill were to be especially aware of population and also to write their senators and congressmen. When the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and the International Planned Parenthood Federation had insisted on continuing to fund programs in China in spite of its reportedly forced abortions, "the Reagan administration" (as the United States government is dubbed in such contexts) canceled its monetary support of both organizations. It was deemed urgent that it now be restored, though argumentation has changed radically from the 1960s or 1970s. Until a decade ago the threat was an imminent worldwide famine, and today's doomsayers are faced with a worldwide grain glut.

From 1975, cereal production per capita rose worldwide by about 15 percent; in less-developed countries, the production of all foods increased by almost 12 percent. Bangladesh, among the poorest and most densely populated of less-developed countries, has been able to cut its grain imports drastically. Chinese corn is flooding the markets of neighboring countries. Saudi Arabia is giving away wheat it no longer wants to store. In Finland farmers are turning surplus wheat into vodka, mink fodder, and glue.

The new balance between population and resources can be aptly illustrated by a worst-case example. India's 1987 drought was the most destructive in 125 years. The two chief grain-producing states, Punjab and Hayana, had almost no rain, and most other states only between 40 and 80 percent of the average. In Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state, half the land was not even sown. Hope that the monsoon would arrive in time to save the rice crop lasted till late July and then was proved futile. Until very recently such a natural disaster would have been the precursor to a major famine. Now the government has in reserve enormous

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stores out of past surpluses. From 1950 to 1983–84 total domestic production of food grains had tripled, and in mid-1987 the stocks totaled twice the amount probably needed to tide the country over the drought. The dread prospect of famine has thus been replaced by worries about the strain on the transport and distribution systems and about inflationary pressure from higher costs of some manufactured commodities. The *Economist* (August 15, 1987) summed up its report, "India's age-old longing for food security has been achieved—so long as it rains next year."

Demographers are taking a new look at population growth, its causes and its effects. The 1984 *World Development Report* of the World Bank, which dealt with population in greater detail than earlier editions of this annual survey, concluded that in fact we do not know how increased numbers of people affect their welfare. There has been very little research on the question, for, as the report's authors remarked, "The complexity of the subject makes it tempting to be agnostic about the consequences of rapid population growth."

The overflow of staples does not mean that all peoples around the globe are eating well, but rather that the problem of hunger has been misconstrued. The causes are partly economic or environmental, but political factors, though usually ignored, are in many instances more important. To gain a preliminary understanding of the recent famine in Ethiopia, for instance, the best background reading would not be a work on desiccation south of the Sahara but Robert Conquest's *Harvest of Sorrow*, a harrowing account of how in the 1930s the Soviet regime successfully planned to starve more than five million Ukrainian peasants to death. Communist Ethiopia must deal in smaller numbers, but, as well as it can, it follows the Stalinist model. Mozambique, recently named the poorest country in the world, has a fertile soil, valuable ores, and a fine coastline. That its GNP has fallen by half over the past five years and its foreign debt has risen to $2.3 billion one must ascribe to its Communist government and the destabilizing efforts of neighboring South Africa. Of the population of roughly fourteen million, more than one person in ten is a would-be refugee, on the road fleeing the civil war but finding no refuge anywhere.

Predictions of a gross disparity between food and population turned out to be false mainly because of the stupendous rise in productivity effected by the green revolution. But demographers have been wrong also in their forecasts of population. As has been shown time and again, statements about the future by population experts are no better (but also no worse) than those by meteorologists and economists. In the real world there are no seers. "A demographer," the demographer Joel Cohen recently explained, "is somebody who guesses wrong about the future of

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populations. A mathematical demographer is somebody who uses mathematics and computers to guess wrong about the future of populations." Indeed, as the English demographer John Hajnal once remarked to a group of his professional peers, it matters not whether population forecasts prophesy well or poorly, for their true function does not depend on their accuracy. Statesmen, businessmen, and administrators of all types must plan for an assumed number of citizens, customers, and clients; and without a prod from a suitably authoritative source, they find it impossible to begin operations. Given a figure, any figure, for the near future, they get under way, and if the projection proves to have been wrong, they make adjustments. Hajnal's novel interpretation was meant as an in-joke, but by now demographers' fallibility is no longer an in-secret. Demand for population projections continues even though some people have begun to suspect that they are not being given a trustworthy product.

Population projections concerning persons already alive can in one sense be fairly accurate, for age-specific death rates are unlikely to change appreciably over a few years. If a school superintendent, for example, wants to know how many pupils will attend each grade ten years from now, he would seem to need as base figures only the preschool and school populations plus the especially unreliable fertility estimates for only some five years. In fact, however, even this simplest case is a bit more complicated. Families move from one school district to another; immigration includes a variable proportion of school-age children; and for college enrollments, administrators must try to guess what percentage of the usual age range will attend and how many older students will also take courses.

Changes in the age and sex structure affect everything. A few years ago the market for toys contracted, and the one for rock music expanded. By the turn of the century, the American population will include thirty million women between the ages of forty and fifty-four; accordingly, last April a magazine called *Quarante*, designed to appeal to American women over forty who have "arrived," got a competitor called *Lear's*, which will concentrate on how women of a certain age can resolve conflicts between traditional and innovative values. Projections of the demand for housing involve not merely age but marriage (and mating) trends, the probable size of families, and the range of home prices most likely to fit the available incomes. Trends in delinquency and crime rates also depend on how the age-sex structure changes, as well as relative efficiency or laxity in law enforcement, whether the shift from male to bisexual delinquency continues, and so on. The indubitable relation between age and crime is impossible to specify, for some teenagers who

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commit crimes become law-abiding as they mature, while others attain enough skill to avoid being caught or, if caught, being convicted.

In short, no matter what social phenomenon we want to analyze, from politics through the market for consumer goods, the sex ratio and the relative sizes of age groups are both relevant and in most cases somewhat intractable to analysis.

I

Some twenty years ago, at the height of the craze to establish zero population growth in the United States, a student asked me to sign a petition endorsing that goal. To realize it, I tried to explain to him, was more complex than the project's sponsors seemed to realize; zero growth would mean, for instance, that more than half of the population would be over thirty. He thought I was pulling his leg: what did growth in numbers have to do with the relative size of age groups? He was not alone in his naive ignorance. One way to distinguish a demographer from someone else writing about population is that the former always, and the latter only sometimes, emphasizes the universal significance of population structure.

If we arrange the elements of a bar graph to represent successive ages from the lowest at the bottom to the highest at the top, each divided between males at the left and females at the right, the typical shape of the graph will be a pyramid. For of those born in, say, 1900, some will have died each year since then, gradually reducing the length of the bars representing successively higher ages. Usually, however, the shape is not a perfect pyramid, for mortality varies by sex and from year to year, and because fertility and migration also affect the population structure. A depletion caused by a past famine or epidemic, or by a period of especially low fertility or large emigration, is represented by an indentation from a smooth pyramid; and a period of exceptionally high fertility or of large immigration is represented by a corresponding bulge. These irregularities remain on population pyramids of successive dates, gradually moving up to the top of the graph and disappearing only when the persons concerned finally die off.

Connections between various parts of the age structure are analyzed with what are called "cohorts." In most dictionaries *cohort* is defined as a body of infantry in the Roman army or, by extension, any band of warriors, with citations in both senses back to the fourteenth century. Among demographers, *cohort* currently means all those who during a single year (or other period) have gone through a particular demographic experience, such as being born (a birth cohort), getting married (a

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marriage cohort), and so on. We have all become familiar with the application of the concept in commercial or political usage—the Young Marrieds; the Gray Panthers; the baby boomers, who, after bursting the walls of every schoolhouse, grew up to become the Yuppies and are now moving into post-Yuppydom. (In Britain, journalists have labeled a group around an extravagantly produced leftist magazine, which features its own regular wine column, the Yummies, or Young Upwardly Mobile Marxists.)

One of the many translations of population structure into popular folklore is the familiar "conflict of generations," a theme often sounded during the 1960s and recurrently revived. There is some truth to the extrapolation from a disobedient child in a family to an unruly age group in universities, but it is hard to gauge how much. Bettina Aptheker, a riot chief at Berkeley in the 1960s, is a daughter of Herbert Aptheker, a prominent American Communist, and neither has deviated from their common party line. The theme of Midge Decter's book, *Liberal Parents, Radical Children*, is that in their homes and schools teenagers were started on a leftward path and then merely kept going.

An issue dividing old and young more pertinent today is what Germans call the *Rentenberg*, the tax mountain that in every Western country young adults will have to climb to fund welfare programs for the old. The problem first became acute in France; the country's perennial low fertility, by reducing the proportion of children, had increased the proportion of elderly in the population; and many workers retired in late middle age, desirous of no more than a modest home in a village and the opportunity to spend every evening at the local café. As Alfred Sauvy, the principal French demographer of the past generation, once wrote, in his country the class conflict between capitalists and workers was being supplanted by one between those in the labor force and the growing number who had retired.

In the United States an organization called Americans for Generational Equity (AGE) represents a softer version of the new class conflict that Sauvy noted. AGE promotes "the long-term welfare of younger and future generations of Americans" through such reforms as a means test for Social Security benefits, increased taxes to balance the national budget, and tax incentives to induce individuals to buy into private retirement programs. AGE is the first lobbying group to represent young adults, a David opposed to several Goliaths like the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) that speak for the old. According to a survey by the Yankelovich Group that AARP commissioned, an improbably high degree of harmony between young and old dispels the "myth" of rising intergenerational antagonism. Even if young adults may be

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more aggressive in demanding relief from a steepening *Rentenberg*, older ones seem to be pleased with the status quo.

II

Deaths of children and particularly of infants are relatively common for two reasons. A baby, if born barely alive, may not be able to remain alive very long; and any baby, even if born healthy, is especially susceptible to infectious disease. For a population lacking modern medicine, if we plot the percentage of all deaths against the ages at which they take place, we find a typical U-shaped curve, with very high rates in infancy and early childhood declining to a low point in early maturity and then gradually rising again in old age.

According to historical analyses of several regions of France, the expectation of life for the period 1680–1720 was about twenty-five years. This does not mean, of course, that everyone died by that age, but rather that the large proportion of deaths early in life, when balanced against the relatively few who survived to old age, averaged out at twenty-five years. The French economist Jean Fourastié took these studies as a base and spelled out the kind of life people led at that time. He invited the reader to consider an average family head, a man who had married for the first time at age twenty-seven. Born into a family of five children, of whom only half reached age fifteen, he also, like his father, had five children, of whom again only two or three were still alive when he died. Living to age fifty-two, this man moved into the venerable elite, for only one in five males got to that advanced age. In his immediate family (not to speak of uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces, and first cousins), he survived an average of nine persons: one of his grandparents (the other three having died before his birth), his two parents, three siblings, and three of his children. He had lived through two or three famines as well as three or four periods of poor harvests and high-priced grain, which recurred every decade or so. He had lived also through sicknesses of his brothers and sisters, his children, his wife (or successive wives), his parents, and himself, having survived two or three epidemics as well as the more or less endemic whooping cough, scarlet fever, diphtheria, and so on. He had often suffered from such ailments as toothaches and slow-healing wounds. Poverty, disabilities, suffering were constantly with him. Death was the center of life, just as the cemetery was the center of the village. This was a representation of life not only in France at that time but also in the rest of Europe and, until rather recently, in most of the less-developed world.

A century or so later, around the year 1800, expectation of life from

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birth in Western Europe and the United States had risen to around thirty-five to forty years, about half of what it is today. In spite of the extension of the average age by ten years or a bit more, life was still similar to Fourastié's reconstruction in the continued expectation that, out of every five children born, one would die before its fifth birthday and another before it reached maturity. The breakthrough to the modern control of mortality took place from the last decades of the nineteenth century to World War I. Infections that attack mainly infants were checked, so that the U-shaped curve lost most of its left leg, changing into a J-shaped curve that in the best cases became almost a reverse L. The remarkable cut in death at early ages was more or less equivalent to a sharp increase in fertility; babies survived that a few years earlier would have died, and for several generations, as a direct consequence, population in industrial nations grew by unprecedented proportions.

There was also a marked change in the relative mortality of the two sexes. The slight evidence that we have indicates that many more males than females are conceived but more males fail to survive gestation. The sex ratio at birth is about 104–105 males to 100 females, but again male infants apparently are more susceptible to disease. A recent United Nations publication compared death rates in thirty-four less-developed and thirty-one developed countries. In the former, most of the sex ratios of deaths during the first year of life were between 100 and 119, and in the latter, between 120 and 139. For some unexplained reason the decline in infant mortality in industrial countries was far greater for females than for males. The sharpest difference between the two categories of countries was in deaths at fifteen to twenty-four years. Again, risks increased very much more among male adolescents and young adults than among females of the same ages: as young men adopt adult roles, they enter the military, suffer many more accidents, die more often from violence. Of the thirty-one developed countries, twenty-three had sex ratios of deaths during this age range from 250 to 349, while among the less-developed countries the dominant pattern was a sex ratio between parity and 159.

In a society without modern medicine, the greatest danger for females is associated with pregnancy and childbirth, but in industrial countries significant developments in obstetrics during the past several decades have reduced this prime risk considerably. As a result of all these trends, the difference between men's and women's life expectation has widened throughout the West. In the United States, females live some seven years longer than males; in the 65–74 age bracket, men's death rates are twice those of women. Moreover, in first marriages, grooms are on the average two years older than brides, and in the

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increasingly common remarriages, the average difference in age is four years. The cumulative effect is a vast production of widows, whose number in the United States increased over the past generation from fewer than six million to more than ten million, while the far smaller number of widowers fell off by a tenth.

For a period, this historic improvement in death control was restricted to the West, but from the 1940s it spread to the rest of the world. The most startling early instance of a new pattern was in Ceylon, where the estimated expectation of life at birth rose from forty-three years in 1946 to fifty-two in 1947. In most Western countries, the nine years of longer life realized in that particular year had taken half a century to achieve. The amazing decline in mortality seemingly derived mainly from one factor—DDT, an insecticide that had been developed during World War II, which, when sprayed from airplanes over low-lying areas, all but eliminated malaria—the principal cause of death in Ceylon—by killing the mosquitoes that carry it. Soon the same control was exercised elsewhere—in India, Mauritius, portions of the Near East—wherever Anopheles mosquitoes bred in large numbers. Before World War II, malaria had been the most potent single cause of sickness and death, and within a few years the World Health Organization felt it appropriate to institute a campaign to eliminate it altogether. It did not succeed, partly because several species of mosquitoes became resistant to the insecticides being used, and partly because zealots, especially in the United States, tried to ban the use of DDT. Most of a special issue of the *WHO Chronicle* (May 1971) was devoted to the latter threat; in the opinion of a wide range of health experts, the cost of withdrawing DDT before the development of an equally effective substitute would have been a disastrous worldwide resurgence of malaria.

Other ailments were brought under control by sulfa compounds and antibiotics. The threat of smallpox, a scourge for centuries, was so much reduced with mass vaccinations that in the mid-1970s several countries repealed the laws compelling everyone to be vaccinated. All these measures, one should emphasize, could be applied to the whole populations of less-developed countries with little or no cooperation from the people affected. Expensive antibiotics and other supplies, as well as medical and administrative personnel, were furnished mainly by Western taxpayers through the funding of international agencies and bilateral relief programs. Peasants all over the world who knew nothing of modern medicine in any other sense soon became quite familiar with penicillin. As before, the main effect was on infant and child mortality, and its decline was again equivalent to a rise in the birth rate—a rise, moreover, that was not accompanied by a change in the social structure,

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the country's technical equipment, familial values, or any other of the supposed determinants of the fertility level.

Soon crude death rates (the number of deaths in a year per thousand persons in the affected population) fell in less-developed countries to levels more or less the same as those in nations with the best health systems. By 1970, rates in industrial countries ranged from, say, 6.8 in Japan to 10.5 in Sweden, and in non-industrial countries from 6.8 in Venezuela to 16.7 in India. This near parity developed in spite of a continuing sharp contrast in the infant mortality rate (deaths during the first year of life per thousand live births); according to United Nations estimates for 1980–85, the infant mortality rate averaged only seventeen for more developed regions but ninety-one for less-developed ones. Many infant deaths in non-industrial countries were caused by infections not susceptible to easy mass control, such as those caused by food contamination. But very few persons in those countries died of heart disease, stroke, and cancers, which attack mainly the elderly and are therefore the main causes of death in developed countries.

In other words, the most publicized population problem of recent decades, the explosion of people in Latin America, the Near East, and Asia—as well as probably Black Africa within the next decade or two—has been the result principally of the successful application of lifesaving techniques and personnel, furnished at great cost and with the best intentions, mainly by the United States and other Western powers.

III

The momentous decline in infant and child mortality was accompanied not, as one might expect, by a fall in fertility but often, so far as we can tell from deficient statistics, by a probable initial rise in the number of children born. Everything favored a high fertility: the population structure set a large proportion in the reproductive ages; the reduced incidence of certain debilities improved fecundity; and nothing had altered the pronatalist norms appropriate to the time when many had to be born for a few to survive to maturity. As part of the new nations' élan, a myth evolved that all social and economic ills, the consequence of colonial maladministration, would miraculously be cured by political independence. In 1948, Nehru termed India "an underpopulated country." In the first years after the Communist victory in China, the country's leaders declared its vast population to be its main economic asset; in the words of one Party official, "Man should be viewed as a producer rather than a consumer." Among an influential sector of Latin American politicians and intellectuals, an increase in numbers was

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applauded with an almost mystical faith in the benefits they would bring; under Juan Perón, for example, the Argentine government hoped to double its population within a generation. Often these nationalist sentiments merged with the Marxist dogma that, given a just and efficient society, a country's population was an irrelevancy. In 1947, a Soviet delegate to the United Nations Population Commission addressed its first meeting by voicing this dogma with a breathtaking abandon: "I would consider it barbaric," he declared, "for the commission to contemplate a limitation of marriages or of legitimate births, and this for any country whatsoever, at any period whatsoever. With an adequate social organization it is possible to face any increase in population." Less extreme asseverations that population growth is, or may be, of benefit to a people's welfare remain an acceptable point of view in the continuing debate, but the utter madness of the immediate post-colonial years has happily dissipated.

Meanwhile Western demographers, new-fangled social workers, and zero populationists were starting a massive effort to furnish contraceptive means to the people of less-developed countries. In the West it was generally assumed that the effects of rapid population growth were harmful and ultimately disastrous and that, moreover, this outside perspective was shared by those bringing the children into the world. Once the parents learned of the existence of effective contraceptives and were helped financially and otherwise to procure them, average family size and population growth would both decline—or so it was thought. What happened was far more complex.

The trend in fertility was seldom such as to settle the issue between the so-called "technological" and "developmental" schools. The "technological" school has concentrated on family-planning programs, assuming that KAP—or knowledge-attitude-practice—marks the road that, irrespective of the social-economic context, most persons in less-developed countries will follow. The "developmental" school has focused on what determines the motivation of potential parents to use whatever contraceptives are available to them. Children cost very little extra to bring up in a tropical country, and they begin to bring material benefits to their parents at a very early age. A poor peasant, who cannot afford to hire help, depends on his family to furnish labor during the planting and harvesting seasons; and landless agriculturalists also earn more if they have sizable families to work with them. For these large social classes, it has been argued, children constitute an economic asset. The Australian demographer John Caldwell summed up the thesis felicitously: fertility falls when the flow of benefits from child to parent is reversed and any offspring costs the parents more than he or she contributes.

If this is valid at the family level, and if rapid population growth is

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deleterious at the national level, the contradiction between the two cannot be easily resolved. The dilemma is sharper now than several decades ago, when those on each side of the debate were more sure that their doctrine was inerrant. Today the more knowledgeable advocates of family-planning programs make more modest claims: some potential contraceptors will have fewer children, and because of the programs, fertility will, or may, fall somewhat, though more slowly than it once was hoped. And on the other side, those who hold that family size is essentially a function of broad trends in the society have come to admit that rapid population growth is often, or generally, a serious impediment to economic development and to such social transformations as a serious reduction of illiteracy. Two partisan schools have come closer together in a common admission of how ignorant both were of the determinants of fertility and of how to effect a meaningful change in it.

Meanwhile, concern about the population growth in less-developed countries spread to a demand, especially in the United States, for zero population growth also in the industrial West. From President Eisenhower's declaration that he could not imagine anything more emphatically *not* a proper governmental function than providing birth control, only ten years passed to President Nixon's complete reversal of this policy. Nixon recommended that the domestic family-planning services supported by the federal government be expanded and integrated, and as a direct consequence of his message, Congress set up the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future to lay a foundation for anti-natalist programs. By 1972, when its recommendations were published, fertility in the United States had fallen below the replacement level, where it has remained ever since. This does not mean that the population is decreasing, but rather that the increase is the fortuitous consequence of the temporary high proportion in the childbearing ages and that, with no change in family size and no net immigration, ultimately a depopulation would proceed to extinction. American women aged eighteen to twenty-four report that they expect to have an average of under 2.0 children, but 2.1 are needed as a minimum to replace the two parents and make up for early deaths and sterile marriages.

Over the past several generations, one of the most important factors in reducing fertility has been the possibility of rising in the social scale. Still today we have the paradox that the poorest parents, those least able materially to care for large families, often have the most children, for many of them see little chance of bettering themselves no matter what they do. Ethnic groups that have taken full advantage of the opportunities in America—such as Jews, Japanese, and Chinese—generally restrict their family responsibilities in order to move up faster. This

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association between family size and upward mobility, a routine element of population dynamics for well over a century, has been intensified by the expanded ambitions of many women. Physiologically, the prime childbearing ages are the twenties, especially the early twenties; but a woman who wants to establish herself in a professional career, and who also wants to have children, is inclined to put off beginning her family (as the phrase goes) until her early or even middle thirties. Several years ago, in her presidential address to the Population Association of America, Jane Menken posed the question, "How late can you wait?" The question whether professional women should have children, trying to combine two partly incompatible styles of life into one, has been aggravated by the sharper problem set by biological limitations about which our knowledge is still scanty.

As recently reviewed by the Dutch demographer Dirk van de Kaa, Europe's birth rates have mostly fallen to below the replacement level. An actual decline in numbers has started in Denmark, West Germany, Austria, and Hungary; and the same may shortly take place in several more countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain. This is a repetition of the experience of the 1930s; then fears of depopulation were ultimately canceled by a totally unanticipated baby boom. Even after the event, we do not fully understand why fertility rose, and we are therefore not in a good position to say what the future trend will be. Most European countries have half-acknowledged pronatalist policies, either positive (for instance, facilitating access to housing by newly married couples) or negative (for instance, the prohibition of abortion), or both. But in the 1930s these same policies seldom worked even in combination, and there is little hope that they will today. Perhaps the most effective way to promote population growth and counter the tendency toward a population structure with too many aged dependents is to foster the influx of immigrants. They are born into their new society, as it were, around age twenty; thus, they immediately reinforce the sector of young adults who both produce the nation's goods and services and reproduce its population. But immigrants, it so happens, are foreigners, and most West European countries, having imported large numbers of "guest workers" during the post-1945 boom, are endeavoring to send them home or, as a minimum, impede the entry of still more.

IV

At first, Western societies' demographic aging (as it is called to distinguish it from the aging of an individual) was mainly the result of a declining birth rate, but in the last several decades the trend has been reinforced by advances in therapy for some of the diseases from which

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old people are likely to die. Even apart from such therapies, the threat of *some* diseases wanes as we grow old; for example, breast cancer is seemingly less likely to develop after menopause. It is worth stressing such contrary instances to counter the persistent emphasis on such ailments as Parkinson's disease and, more generally, on the loss of organic functions and intellectual acuity.

When serious gerontological studies began a generation or two ago, researchers looking for subjects typically used those conveniently assembled in "old people's homes." This subsector, though quite atypical of the whole age group, was long used to characterize the old, and we are still in the process of correcting the false impressions we were all taught. The American demographer Jacob Siegel has divided those at or close to retirement into several subclasses, with markedly different physiological and social characteristics: "the older population" (sixty and over), "the elderly" (sixty-five and over), "the aged" (seventy-five and over), and "the extreme aged" (eighty-five and over). The crucial question overall is whether the extension of life, past or projected, is associated with an improved health or with a larger number of dependent superannuated. In 1981, members of a Vienna conference recommended that we substitute for all such terms as "the aged" or "the elderly" the single one, "the aging," in order to emphasize a highly variable process rather than presumably fixed states.

In the United States, though the distribution of income by age changed dramatically when Social Security was instituted in the 1930s, as late as the 1950s more than a third of the elderly were living in poverty. Today the age bracket of Americans with the greatest wealth per capita, those aged fifty-five to sixty-four, is followed by the next older, those aged sixty-five and over. Since 1982 the poverty rate of the older population has been under that of the general population. Those who retire with a pension and Social Security generally maintain the same level of living as when they were working; more than 90 percent live alone or with a spouse. According to Harris polls in 1974 and again in 1981, most older people report that they are better off than the country believes them to be.

Problems of the older population are concentrated among the extreme aged, those eighty-five years and over. Data concerning the "oldest old" are poor. Their ages as reported in the census are notoriously inaccurate, and statistics on income, health, and other conditions of life are no better. The number of the oldest old is estimated at 2.6 million, or only 1 percent of the population; and even if that subpopulation more than doubles by the end of the century, which is quite likely, this roughly 2 percent of the population would not constitute an unbearable burden if other conditions were to remain the same.

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Adequate care for the older population will be a social and political problem not because of their larger number but because of such other factors as the rising cost of medical care and changes in the age structure. This year the largest cohort among the American baby boomers (4.6 million persons) will have its thirtieth birthday; the generation whose political wisdom was summed up in "Never trust anyone over thirty" is moving into purgatory. One in every four adult Americans is in his or her thirties, which means that most of them are thinking less of childish pastimes and more of job security, family stability, the safety of their home and children, the size of their income and property taxes, and other mundane matters. It means also that input to the Social Security system, based on the number of persons in the labor force, is adequate. However, in contrast, from 1980 to 1986 the number of Americans aged fifteen to nineteen fell off by about 2.5 million, or 12 percent; these cohorts of the "baby bust" are about to move into the labor market and, because of their smaller numbers, start a crunch on the funding of Social Security. With minor differences, this is also the situation in other industrial countries.

For rough calculations it is usual to divide the whole age range into three sectors—persons aged, respectively, 0–14, 15–64, and 65 and over. Thus, the dependency ratio, or dependents compared with producers, is conventionally defined as those aged 0–14 plus those aged 65 and over compared with those aged 15–64. In the United States, every three persons who were working in 1980 (assuming somewhat unrealistically that all persons between the ages of 15 and 64 were in the labor force) supported two persons either below or above the productive ages. The two types of dependency have moved in opposite directions, with far fewer dependent children and somewhat more dependent aged. In spite of AFDC, school lunches, and so on, most children are cared for privately in a family setting. Most elderly receive at least partial care from the state, ranging from Medicare at a minimum to full public institutionalization. Put another way, the taxes that are used to provide for the old partly determine what is left after taxes, and this remnant is one factor in potential parents' decision about how many children they will have.

In a primitive society one way of dealing with the unproductive aged is politely labeled gerontocide. According to a detailed comparison of ethnographic studies in about ninety-five societies, infirm old people were killed off in thirteen and abandoned or exposed to the elements in nine. One can reasonably assume that in most of the other societies no heroic measures, as the slang phrase puts it, were used to extend the life of useless and dependent members. In such advanced civilizations as classical China, on the other hand, the elderly were revered. In *Japanese Things*, a delightful account of nineteenth-century Japan, Basil Hall

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Chamberlain summarized an ethical primer, "Four and Twenty Paragons of Filial Piety," that was used to train the young in the proper respect for the old. One Paragon slept uncovered so that mosquitoes would attack him and leave his parents undisturbed. Another, though seventy years old, crawled about in baby's clothes in order to delude his ninety-year-old parents into believing that they could not be so old after all. In a society with an unchanging culture whose traditions are held in great esteem, the old can appropriately exercise much authority. Granting them special deference and honor, moreover, entails little sacrifice, for in such a society the proportion who survive to anything approaching three score and ten is always very small.

Less-developed countries (apart from those that have oil to export) also are poor. How to specify the poorest among them is not easy, and international agencies use different criteria. The United Nations defines "least developed countries" as those with a combination of low income per capita, low literacy rates, and little manufacturing industry. Of the thirty-six such countries in 1982, twenty-six were in Africa and eight in Asia, plus Haiti and Samoa. The population under age fifteen ranged from over a third to not quite half, with most of the countries around 43 to 47 percent. In contrast, only 2 to 5 percent were age sixty-five and over. The corresponding proportions of the United States population were 22 and 12 percent; and those of West Germany, as a European example, 17 and 15 percent. Even if we remember that in these very poor countries children become productive at early ages, the burden of dependency on young adults is heavy. Crude birth rates are in the forties, crude death rates close to twenty; this means that, with no change in the rates, the population doubles every twenty-five to thirty years. With such a population structure, campaigns to reduce the size of the average family would have to be successfully maintained for several generations to counteract the effect on fertility of the constant large flow into the prime reproductive ages. Cutting the number of children per family avails little when the number of families keeps growing.

V

We Americans, it would seem, are unduly impressed by statistics, and we are constantly fed figures of all kinds. A publication called *Harper's Index* compiles such bits of information—for example, that 42 percent of Americans regularly attend religious services, 150 schools invited Lee Iacocca to speak at their graduation ceremonies, and so on. Advertising agencies, presumably following tests of relative effectiveness, insistently inform us, for instance, that 83.2 percent of health professionals recommend a certain product. Many such figures are, if not made up, then

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based on so slight a foundation that we should automatically dismiss them. But to assure ourselves that a count is reasonably accurate is only the first step toward understanding what the statistics mean.

We all know that Mexico and Brazil have huge foreign debts, but few are aware of the fact that, per capita, Ireland's foreign debt is three times that of Mexico. Absolute numbers used to compare entities of grossly different dimensions are almost always misleading, but it may not help to convert the absolute figures into percentages. During the Soviet Union's first two five-year plans, when published statistics on industrial production were very sparse indeed, comparative percentages appeared relatively often: in the United States, production of steel, say, rose by 3 percent, in the Soviet Union by 27 percent—but, as we were not told, from widely divergent bases. In an example discussed by Galileo, if a horse worth a hundred dollars is appraised at ten dollars by one person and at one thousand dollars by another, who deviated more from the true value? Galileo held that the two were equally in error, since 1,000:100 = 100:10, but that is not the only "correct" answer.

A rate is a device for comparing the actual with the potential. We put the number of births in a year in the numerator and the population in which they occurred in the denominator and get a figure, called the crude birth rate, that can range from around ten to fifty or more. It is called "crude" because some portion of those in the denominator designated as potential mothers are in fact children, males, or women beyond the age of childbearing. So in a first adjustment, we change the denominator to females aged, say, 15 to 44. But the physiological ability to bear a child varies greatly over that age range, and to be more precise we calculate separately birthrates for females aged 15–19, 20–24, and so on. As this familiar example illustrates, perhaps the most useful refinement of a crude rate of any activity is to break it down by sex and by age group. The reason, of course, is that virtually all behavior patterns diverge along those two dimensions, partly because of physiology, partly because of the cultural norms of every society.

It may be interesting to exemplify from several actual cases how tricky it can be to interpret statistics if the population structure is not taken into account.

- In a 1905 Massachusetts state census, married women were asked how many children they had borne (an average of 2.77) and how many their mothers had borne (an average of 6.47). There had been, in other words, a disastrous decline in family size over only one generation. (The fertility in process of the respondents, who ranged in age from eighteen up, was compared with the completed fertility of the respondents' mothers, all of whom were past the childbearing period.)
- During the Spanish-American War, the secretary of war responded

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in his annual report to public criticism about the large number of soldiers dying in the Philippines. Their death rate, he pointed out, was almost identical with that of the civilian population of Washington. (The soldiers were all in the age group with normally the lowest mortality; the civilians included the full range.)

• Proponents of the restrictive immigration laws that were enacted in the 1920s almost always contrasted immigrants' birth rates and crime rates with the much lower ones of the native population. (Immigrants were mainly in the age group from which both parents and criminals come.)

• During the 1970s, baby boomers and women flooded into the labor market, but for the next ten years or so only about half as many people, the products of the baby bust, will enter the labor force each year. This should mean a fall in unemployment and a possible rise in the wages of young workers. (Because black fertility rates remained high, blacks will make up about a fifth of new entrants, or double the percentage a decade earlier. Many will be less educated, unskilled, an aggravated problem rather than the contrary. In other words, a breakdown by age may have to be supplemented with one by race if we are to avoid misunderstanding.)

• The family income of various ethnic groups in the American population ranges from a high of well over one and a half times the national average for Jews down to under two-thirds of the national average for American Indians. There are many reasons for the differences, of which the one probably most often cited is discrimination. (More important is median age—from the mid-thirties to the mid-forties for Jews, Poles, Irish, Italians, and Germans, and from eighteen to the low twenties for blacks, American Indians, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans. Men and women well along in their careers earn more than recent entrants into the labor force.)

• The last census of the Soviet Union, in 1979, included the usual question on age, as we know from the enumeration schedule. In a non-totalitarian country such basic statistics would be in the very first publications of census results. However, except for a few partial citations of minor importance, no age data have been published. How is it that, even after the era of Soviet "openness" has been proclaimed, officials have somehow overlooked this omission? (Murray Feshbach, the most knowledgeable of American Sovietologists on such matters, acquired a set of age and sex data for four republics of the USSR and published them in 1985, six years after the census. The change in the sex ratio of children from 1970 to 1979 indicated that infant mortality had increased during the intercensal period by between a third and a half. Statistics for the four republics, which approximate four ethnic components of the

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USSR, show that the Russian, Ukrainian, and Latvian sectors are declining relative to the Uzbek—and presumably other Muslim sectors. Because of shifts in the age structure, the growth of the work force will be much slower and also concentrated in the non-Slavic population. The mere publication of age and sex statistics can inform such a demographer as Feshbach about changes in the population with highly significant economic, social, and military implications.)

When an intelligent layman is given information about a field that is both somewhat technical and of great social and political significance, how can he judge the worth of that message? Nobel laureates in physics regularly give us diametrically opposed dogmas on every question related to nuclear bombs and national defense. I once asked Edward Teller how, with one undergraduate course in physics, I should judge between the two schools, and he responded, somewhat characteristically, that the question is so vital that every American should study enough physics to be able to decide such issues on their merits. Demography is a far easier discipline than nuclear physics, but I would not suggest that everyone's civic duty should include a professional mastery of population dynamics.

I mean to leave the reader with two thoughts, both rather simple. The notion that we can bring about harmony between growing populations and their social-economic-political environment merely by instituting family-planning programs in every village of the world is obsolete, opposed by some professionals, not fully defended even by those who once fanatically propounded the thesis. This does not mean that all such programs are useless but rather that most of them have fallen far short of the exaggerated expectations of a generation ago. Second, take any statistical datum about population with a healthy dose of salt, and, in particular, test its probable validity by considering how it applies separately to the two sexes and to the various age groups.

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The Strange Story of Herschel Grynszpan

MICHAEL R. MARRUS

HERSCHEL FEIBEL GRYNSZPAN's harried, furtive existence as a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany ended abruptly on November 7, 1938, when he shot the Third Secretary of the German embassy in Paris, Ernst vom Rath. The diplomat died two days later. Only seventeen years old, vom Rath's assassin then entered a judicial, diplomatic, and political maze from which he probably never emerged. Although we remain unclear about the death of Herschel Grynszpan, we know that vom Rath's murder was the pretext for the furious anti-Jewish riots of *Kristallnacht*, or Night of the Broken Glass, that rumbled across Germany under the orders of Joseph Goebbels and lesser Nazi zealots. We know that Grynszpan's assassination of vom Rath provoked trouble between France and Germany on the eve of the Second World War. And we also know that Grynszpan was never tried for his offense, despite elaborate preparations that had been made, both by the French before the war and by top Nazi officials once the hapless defendant fell into their hands in 1940. Grynszpan's desperate gesture has its place in the annals of Nazi persecution and in the register of those futile but symbolic acts of resistance against unspeakable tyranny. The rest of Grynszpan's story remains obscure, however, and deserves to be better known.

Born in Hanover, Germany, in 1921, Grynszpan, like his immigrant parents, was of Polish nationality, and from them he learned something about his Jewish heritage. For about a year he attended a yeshiva, or rabbinical seminary, in Frankfurt am Main. The Grynszpan family was quite poor; Herschel's father was unemployed in the early years of the depression. As outsiders, the Grynszpans suffered acutely from the first wave of Nazi anti-Jewish laws and the efforts to rid the Reich of so-called "Jewish domination." In public school in the years immediately after Hitler became chancellor of Germany, Herschel had to sit at the back of his class and was treated as an outcast. A slight and apparently impressionable youth, Grynszpan managed to leave Germany in 1936 when he was only fifteen. He went first to an uncle, who was living in Brussels, and then crossed illegally into France. He was unable to afford the small

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cost of a visa and thus took advantage of the easy passage, at that time, across the frontier between the two countries. Sheltered in Paris by another uncle and an aunt, he worked at odd jobs, learned some French, and went often to the cinema. Preoccupied with his private troubles and with the catastrophe that had befallen the Jews in Germany, Grynszpan attended a Polish Jewish sports club in Paris and pored voraciously over Yiddish-language newspapers.

Although he attempted to regularize his status in France, Grynszpan never succeeded. Somehow he could never assemble the documents necessary to satisfy the authorities and establish his right to remain where he was. Grynszpan's face, it has been said, never lost the expression of a hunted animal. Despite frequent interventions by his uncle on his behalf, and despite repeated applications to police and consular authorities, the young refugee gradually became what the French called a *clandestin*—an illegal resident ever in danger of being expelled. On July 8, 1938, the French ordered him to leave France in a matter of weeks.

Where could he go? His Polish passport authorizing residency in Germany had expired more than a year before. His parents remained in Hanover, and while he had a few relatives in Poland, he knew nothing of that country or its language. Grynszpan, like many others in his difficult situation, went underground. Tracked by the police, he slept in a tiny maid's room on the sixth floor of a building near his uncle's home. During the day Grynszpan avoided the streets. He contemplated joining the foreign legion and may have thought of suicide. By autumn he was desperate.

At the end of October, Grynszpan learned that his entire family had been expelled from Germany as a result of a clash between Poland and the Reich over Polish expatriates. At issue were some fifty thousand Polish Jews living in Germany and its newly absorbed Austrian territory. Warsaw announced that it would soon revoke the citizenship of all Polish citizens who had been living abroad for more than five years. Faced with having to "absorb" these soon-to-be-stateless Jews, the Germans began, on October 26, to round up Polish Jews and ship them to the frontier. The Gestapo did the job with stunning brutality, eager to bundle their victims across the border before the Poles could block their entry.

Grynszpan's sister Berta sent Herschel a postcard that reached him on November 3, four days before the assassination. She described the arrest of an entire neighborhood of Polish Jews in Hanover: "We were not permitted to return to our homes. I begged to be allowed to return home to get at least a few essential things. So I left with a 'Shupo' accompanying me and I packed a valise with the most necessary clothes.

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That is all I could save. We don't have a cent. To be continued when next I write. Warm greetings and kisses from us all. Berta."

Years later, at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, the elderly father of Herschel Grynszpan described the family's deportation this way:

> The SS men used whips to hurry us across fields to the [Polish] frontier line. Those who faltered were struck, blood spurted, bundles were grabbed from people's hands. It was the first time I had seen the barbaric behavior of Germans. They told us to run. I was struck and fell into a ditch.

Then the elder Grynszpan told how they were forced across the border, with the women first, so that the Polish guards would not shoot. "Rain was falling hard. There was no bread. People were fainting—some suffered heart attacks—and on all sides one saw old men and old women. Our suffering was great."

Together with more than eight thousand others, the Grynszpans first arrived in Zbaszyn, a frontier town of about six thousand people on the Polish-German border, in a kind of no-man's-land where many of the expellees languished for many months, while the Germans and Poles quarreled over their fate. Essentially, Poland refused to admit them, and the Germans would not take them back. Grynszpan received only fragmentary news about his family. But newspapers carried full accounts; from the start the attention of the international and the Jewish press was riveted on the deportations, reminiscent of the expulsions of Jews in the Middle Ages. While the young Grynszpan in Paris had only sketchy information from the Polish border, he clearly had grounds to believe the worst.

Distraught and fearful, Herschel broke with his only benefactors in Paris, his uncle and aunt. On Sunday, November 6, the day before the assassination, Grynszpan argued furiously with them at dinner, probably over money. Just as the world of his family in Hanover collapsed in ruins, Grynszpan seems to have undermined his only refuge and regular social contact. That night he slept badly in a hotel near his former home and seems to have determined to make a dramatic public statement. The next morning he wrote to his uncle, on a postcard found in his wallet at the time of his arrest:

> With God's help [written in Hebrew] . . . I couldn't do otherwise. My heart bleeds when I think of our tragedy and that of the 12,000 Jews. I have to protest in a way that the whole world hears my protest, and this I intend to do. I beg your forgiveness. Herman.

He then entered a gunsmith's shop nearby, purchased a pistol and ammunition, and took the Métro to the German embassy on the rue de Lille.

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Accounts of the assassination differ slightly, but the basic facts are simple enough: Grynszpan asked a receptionist at the German embassy if he could see an official; he probably hoped to assassinate the ambassador. Instead, Grynszpan was shown into the office of Ernst vom Rath, whom he promptly shot. Subdued without difficulty by embassy personnel, he was then turned over to the local police, who took him to the Fresnes prison and began lengthy interrogations.

Ernst vom Rath died shortly after 4:00 P.M. on November 9. Although by some testimony a gentle, cultivated scion of the German aristocracy, possibly even a lukewarm or unenthusiastic Nazi, vom Rath immediately became a martyr for the cause of the Third Reich. "In response to the assassination of Legionstrat vom Rath," Nazi police boss Reinhard Heydrich told his subordinates, "during the night of November 9 to 10 there should be demonstrations against the Jews." Within hours, Nazi party activists and brown-shirted storm troopers launched attacks on Jews throughout Germany. Instigated by propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels, who portrayed the riots as a spontaneous uprising of the German people, the orgy of destruction and violence was in fact carefully planned and orchestrated. Gangs of Nazis assaulted Jews, burned synagogues, and destroyed the property in scores of towns and cities throughout the Reich. Everywhere in Germany organized mobs shattered windows—leaving the streets full of broken glass, which gave the riots their name. Ninety-one Jews were dead the next morning, and twenty to thirty thousand were interned and sent to prisons or concentration camps.

Assessing the damage in the office of Hermann Göring a few days later, Nazi leaders decided that the destruction had been costly and even harmful to German interests. Göring insisted that the insurance companies fulfill their obligations but made sure that no Jew should receive payment. To cover the damages, Berlin imposed a one-billion-mark fine on the Jews of the Reich. A series of harsh decrees now rained down on the victims of *Kristallnacht,* who were held to be responsible for what had happened. New laws excluded Jews from the German economy and confiscated what remained of their property. The Nazi leadership, moreover, evinced a certain dissatisfaction with the riotous outburst, preferring instead a more concerted anti-Jewish policy. Henceforth, by direction of the Führer himself, "the Jewish question [was to] be now, once and for all, coordinated or solved in one way or another." Göring was put in charge. He, in turn, more sharply defined the German policy, which was to drive the Jews out of the country. Göring designated Heydrich and the SS to speed Jewish emigration, if necessary by expulsions—the very policy in reaction to which Herschel Grynszpan

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had struck on November 7. Clearly, the only immediate result of his act, apart from the wave of violence, was to bring matters to a head.

Undoubtedly it was a chastened and unhappy seventeen-year-old who now faced the lengthy pre-trial investigation in Paris, conducted by Judge Jean Tesnière, a specialist in juvenile delinquency cases. But Grynszpan remained firm in his convictions. Despite shifts in the nature of his defense and in his accounts of the details of the assassination, Grynszpan persistently maintained the explanation he had declared during his first interrogation: "I acted . . . because of love for my parents and for my people who were subjected unjustly to outrageous treatment. . . . It is not, after all, a crime to be Jewish. I am not a dog. I have the right to live. My people have a right to exist on this earth."

Accompanying this anguished appeal, other voices sounded over the vom Rath assassination. From Berlin, Joseph Goebbels fulminated against the Jews, and by implication the French state that harbored so many of them. "This odious attack," he declared, "once again deprives our people from attaining the peace and quiet they have so deserved. The murder of a German diplomat was carried out in order to provoke trouble between Germany and the other great European powers. . . . It was a shot in the back." At the elaborate state funeral for vom Rath, Nazi foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, who delayed a planned trip to Paris for one month as a result of the assassination, rattled the German saber: "No terror exists which can stop the rise of Germany. If today, a new wave of hate breaks out against us, if once again there is an attempt to profane the memory of our dead, then a storm of indignation will sweep across Germany." And he ended darkly, "We understand this challenge and will know how to answer it."

To watch over German interests in the prosecution of Grynszpan, the Führer dispatched to Paris an associate from Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry, Professor Friedrich Grimm. Grimm and his elaborate staff, together with French lawyers hired to represent them, thereafter lurked in the background of the case, constantly nudging the judicial proceedings along paths that would avoid the charges against the Reich leveled by the youthful assassin.

In America, meanwhile, opinion mobilized on Grynszpan's behalf. A famous journalist at the *New York Herald-Tribune,* Dorothy Thompson, took up his cause and appealed for help. Telegrams, letters, and donations for the defense flooded back in response. Representatives of the World Jewish Congress and the Federation of Jewish Societies in France also joined the fray, alarmed about the anti-Jewish backlash orchestrated in Germany and threatening elsewhere. Together these groups enlisted the aid of a famous anti-fascist lawyer entrusted with Grynszpan's defense, Maître Vincent de Moro-Giafferi.

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For the French government, the assassination could not have occurred at a worse moment. Coming in the wake of the crisis over Czechoslovakia and the Munich conference, it found Paris uncertain over the extent of German demands, nervous about worsening relations with the British, and worried about the crippling of its Czech ally. French diplomats were extremely concerned about the deteriorating diplomatic situation and actively sought a Franco-German rapprochement preparatory to a general settlement in Europe. On November 5, just two days before the assassination of vom Rath, Ribbentrop had forwarded to Paris a draft agreement of a Franco-German accord. French foreign minister Georges Bonnet, a champion of "appeasement," hoped to mollify the Germans over the issue of Jewish refugees, considered a minor, unnecessary irritant in relations between the two countries. When Bonnet finally met Ribbentrop in December, he told his German counterpart that there was great interest in France "in a solution to the Jewish question." "The French," according to Ribbentrop, "did not want to receive any more Jews from Germany" and sought German help in keeping them out. In a dangerous moment, Bonnet was doing his best to reach an understanding with Berlin. It was all the more important, therefore, to keep the Grynszpan affair at a low level. This is the likely reason that the trial did not take place before the outbreak of war the following year, despite the completion of the necessary paperwork.

Over the next months, the defenders of Grynszpan quarreled over the best strategy to adopt. Some favored a narrowly presented case, seeking to dampen the anti-Jewish passions aroused by the assassination in order to secure the most lenient sentence for the accused. Appalled at the violence against the Jews of Germany, Moro-Giafferi, and also the Grynszpan committee, adopted this view. Others sought to use the forthcoming trial as an occasion to document and denounce the Nazis' persecution of the Jews. Grynszpan himself seems to have favored the latter approach, persistently maintaining the account of the assassination he had first given to investigating officers.

Grynszpan remained in prison until the German invasion of France in May 1940. By then the government clearly had no interest in a trial and probably had no plans whatever to deal with Grynszpan. Swept along by administrative momentum, he was evacuated with other prisoners to Orléans, and then to the town of Bourges, about two hundred and twenty kilometers south of Paris. The prisoners' convoy broke apart after being strafed by German aircraft, but Grynszpan, apparently fearing that he would be taken by the Germans, preferred to remain in custody. There is some confusion about what happened next. Local authorities dispatched him farther south, well into territory controlled by the Vichy government and known as the "free zone," likely not caring any longer

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whether he remained a prisoner or not. In a matter of days Grynszpan reached Toulouse, in the south of France, not far from the Pyrenees and the border with Spain. Alone and without resources, possibly hopeful that the French would care for him, Grynszpan turned himself over to the French police. This proved to be a fatal mistake.

What Grynszpan did not know was that the Germans were on his trail. The day after they entered Paris, in mid-June, they sent an SS team to search the Paris prefecture for police files on several wanted émigrés, including the notorious young assassin Herschel Grynszpan. Two weeks later they arrested and interrogated the public prosecutor of Bourges, who had helped Grynszpan escape. Taking advantage of the Vichy government's eagerness to accede to German wishes, the Germans demanded that he be handed over. Vichy complied on July 18, without any formal extradition proceeding and before Grynszpan's attorney even had a chance to protest. Two days later, he was in Berlin.

What we know up to this point comes mainly from the extensive public discussion of the Grynszpan affair and evidence drawn from the elaborate French investigation of the assassination. Much of the French material was collected in the early 1960s by a French physician, Dr. Alain Cuenot, who tracked down several important witnesses. But from this point onward, as Grynszpan entered the maw of the Third Reich, the evidence becomes much thinner. Grynszpan, it seems likely, never emerged from the Nazi clutches. For a time, he fit the Germans' plans for an elaborate propaganda coup. When these plans were dashed, likely sabotaged by Grynszpan himself, the Germans' use for their captive seems to have waned. And with this, the German documentation on Grynszpan becomes more scarce, so that in the end we are not even certain how Herschel Grynszpan died.

Documents uncovered by the Allies at Nuremberg provide a crucial source for what happened to Grynszpan in Germany. The Nazis, these documents indicate, planned a fantastic show trial, not unlike those Europeans witnessed in the Soviet Union during the 1930s. Their idea was to focus attention on Jewish terrorism and demonstrate nothing less than the Jews' responsibility for the outbreak of war in Europe. Roland Freisler, a former Communist turned Nazi and a high official in the Ministry of Justice, was placed in charge.

Plans went forward for an elaborate public tribunal to begin work in February 1942. But before the trial could begin, several difficulties emerged that delayed the proceedings substantially. First, the various ministries supposed to be coordinating their efforts fell to quarreling with one another over the direction of the trial. The Propaganda Ministry, under Goebbels, wanted to heighten a campaign against "International Judaism" by stressing the pre-war collusion by the Jews

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against Germany. The Foreign Ministry, under Ribbentrop, wanted the trial to accent the breakdown of relations with France. Representatives from the Ministry of Justice preferred a thorough, narrowly defined trial that would concentrate on the facts of the assassination. Hitler failed to resolve these disputes, but he intervened nevertheless, removing Freisler from the role of chief director and placing Otto Thierack, president of the Nazis' People's Court, in charge. The implication of this obscure move, apparently, was to tip the balance in Goebbels's favor.

Under Goebbels's direction, planning continued for a show trial to begin on May 10. A parade of witnesses would establish the circumstances of the crime, but the proceedings were to go much further than this. At the very center would be the Jewish question in its many guises, including the role of the Jews in foreign countries, the Jewish plans to sabotage Ribbentrop's visit to Paris in 1938, and the influence of Jews in the United States—as exemplified in their rallying to support the assassin Grynszpan. State counselor Wolfgang Diewerge, a member of Goebbels's staff at the Propaganda Ministry, was to organize an entire day of testimony on the preparations for war against the Reich by world Judaism.

One of the star witnesses, according to Goebbels, would be former French foreign minister Georges Bonnet, reported by German contacts in Paris to be willing to take the stand on the side of the prosecution. Bonnet, Goebbels wrote, "is ready to testify that he opposed the declaration of war against Germany, but that the French government was put under such heavy pressure by the Jews that it could not avoid declaring war." "This shows in what an irresponsible way this war was started," Goebbels added, "and how heavily those must be punished who acted so rashly." In fairness to Bonnet it must be added that, in 1964, he strenuously denied that he had had any intention of going to Germany. Bonnet said that Admiral Darlan, then head of government at Vichy, had nevertheless authorized both Bonnet and judicial officials who had been involved in the case to participate in the Berlin trial.

Unhappily for Goebbels, however, all of these plans came to naught. The probable reason was a *coup de théâtre* struck by the defendant himself. Having maintained up to this point that he shot vom Rath as a protest against the persecution of the Jews, Grynszpan now advanced what was to Goebbels an outrageous line of defense. Hitler's propaganda chief recorded the news in his diary: "Grynszpan has insolently invented a homosexual liaison with Embassy Counsellor vom Rath. It is nothing other than a shameless fabrication. But it is a lucky inspiration for him, since if it were brought to trial it would become a dominant theme in adverse propaganda."

According to a variety of sources, notably Grynszpan's French chron-

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icler Dr. Cuenot and also an American investigator, Gerald Schwab, who researched the Grynszpan affair at the end of the war, the origin of the story of homosexuality was the defendant's French attorney, Maître Moro-Giafferi. He claimed in 1947 that he simply invented the story as a possible line of defense, one that would put the affair in an entirely new light. In fact, however, rumors about vom Rath's homosexuality were in the air in Paris immediately after the assassination. Whatever the exact origins of the story, its utility was obvious: the murder could be presented not as a political act but as a *cause passionelle*—a lover's quarrel, in which the German diplomat could be judged incidentally as having seduced a minor. Moro-Giafferi shared the fears of the Grynszpan committee at the time of *Kristallnacht* that a political trial would be a catastrophe for the Jews of Germany and elsewhere. By adopting this legal strategy, they hoped to defuse the affair and also reduce the penalty drastically, possibly even prompting a suspended sentence.

The problem, however, was the boy himself. In 1939, Grynszpan adamantly refused to accept this defense and remained unbending in his original contention—that he shot vom Rath in protest against Nazi Jewish policy. There the matter lay until 1942, when it surfaced once again as one of Goebbels's most vexing problems. On the basis of the available evidence, it seems that the propaganda chief in this case was right: the story was a simple fabrication, but it was a fabrication now seized by the defendant as his only hope to avoid a show trial. Taking this line, of course, was an act of extraordinary courage on Grynszpan's part: he almost certainly knew that he was only being kept alive for the purposes of a trial, and by subverting these plans, he might have been signing his own death warrant.

The trial organizers had real reason to worry. They had hoped to bring to the proceedings representatives from the European press, including newsmen from neutral countries. What they doubtless wanted was a pliant victim, the kind of cringing, docile accused that the Soviets had been so successful in producing during the Great Purges of the 1930s. Instead, Grynszpan likely reminded them of Marinus van der Lubbe, the bizarre Dutchman found half-naked in the burning Reichstag building in 1933, who proved to be a most unsatisfactory defendant during his own trial, because he would not admit that he was part of a broad Communist conspiracy against the new Nazi government. Worse still, Grynszpan now threatened publicly to besmirch a martyred German diplomat with a charge of pederasty—raising a question about which Nazi leaders were inordinately sensitive. Martin Bormann, Hitler's troubleshooter on sensitive internal matters, conveyed the bad news to the Führer. The Nazi dictator, who was revolted by sexual irregularities and who loathed being ridiculed, seems to have called a

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halt to Goebbels's venture. A few weeks later, with the agreement of Ribbentrop, the proceedings were postponed.

Thereafter, the information about Grynszpan is sketchy, and one cannot be certain what happened next. Grynszpan was well treated before his trial, for the Nazis wanted their victim to appear to the world in a healthy condition. When the proceedings were suspended in the spring of 1942, those officials in charge believed that the trial might well resume under better circumstances. In all likelihood, the Nazis wanted to keep Grynszpan alive, and he was not maltreated—at least for a time.

One high-ranking German foreign office official involved in the case later reported that Grynszpan died shortly before the end of the war but was unable to say how he perished. Another witness, himself an anti-Nazi internee, declared in 1959 that he had seen Grynszpan in the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin and that he was later transferred to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. In this version, Grynszpan was later transferred to several other prisons and may have lived long enough to be liberated by the Americans in 1945. For a decade and a half after the end of the war, there were periodic reports that Grynszpan had survived the war and was living under an assumed name.

In Hanover, in 1958, Herschel Grynszpan's father, then living in Israel, attempted to put the matter to rest by appealing to a German court for reparation payments from the Bonn government for his son's death. The court studied the evidence carefully and concluded that the boy was indeed dead. A death certificate for Herschel Feibel Grynszpan was issued on June 1, 1960. A researcher in Berkeley, California, Ron Roizen, has carefully gone over the ground again and has come to a similar conclusion: "Claims for Grynszpan's survival were invariably based on a mix of rumor and chance sightings of the boy prior to the end of the war. Such claims invariably crumble before serious prodding."

Grynszpan probably died in a Nazi camp in the last phase of the war—when hundreds of thousands of others were swept away by starvation, disease, maltreatment, and massacre. Unlike most prisoners, he escaped the terrible anonymity that has generally been the lot of Hitler's victims. We at least know something about his fate and can hear his voice of protest that cries out beyond the grave. His story should not be forgotten. It has continuing dramatic appeal, of course, because of the unusual juxtaposition of sub-themes—the *Kristallnacht* pogrom, French appeasement policy, Nazi views of sexuality, and the propaganda strategies of the Third Reich. But the story is also compelling because of hints about the character of the boy himself. We do not know much about Herschel Grynszpan's personality, but scraps of information available suggest a quite ordinary youth who was driven to lash out against a

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ruthless tyranny. Grynszpan did more than suffer under Nazi oppression; he struck against it in the most radical way that occurred to him. Afterwards, despite the formidable forces mobilized against him, he held his ground on principle—most likely at the cost of his life. Finally, by insight into a weakness at the core of the Third Reich, he may have sabotaged an elaborate Nazi propaganda enterprise.

Beyond this, the Grynszpan story highlights three important historical issues. First, the assassination of Ernst vom Rath raises the difficult question of strategies of opposition to persecution. Did the attack on vom Rath only worsen the conditions Jews faced at the end of 1938? This was argued by Dr. Alain Cuenot and many Jews at the time. In the end, I remain unconvinced, if only because what we know about Nazi policy suggests its implacable commitment to solve the Jewish question one way or another, sooner or later—*so oder so,* as Hitler said. It remains true, nevertheless, that the Nazis seized upon the assassination to radicalize their persecution. They could doubtless have found another pretext, but Grynszpan certainly provided them with what they needed.

Second, the Grynszpan story elucidates the refugee crisis of the 1930s and the special agony of Jews cast adrift in a world that had no place for them to land. Grynszpan's parents ended up in Zbaszyn, a special hell between two countries, Poland and Germany, that wanted to get rid of their Jews. Grynszpan himself was effectively stateless, caught in a legal limbo that allowed him no exit. Expelled from France, he had no country to which he could go. Frustrated and depressed, he sought a violent way out, and he was not the last person to find this kind of solution to an impossible problem.

Finally, Grynszpan's ordeal in Germany provides further insight into the dynamics of Nazism and suggests that on rare occasions the machinery of persecution was not as omnipotent as we sometimes think. In the preparation of the Grynszpan trial, the various Nazi agencies worked at cross-purposes, each attempting to subvert the intentions of the other. Before the threat of scandal, in the end, Hitler beat a hasty and undignified retreat. In the orchestration of falsehood, we often consider Nazism as invincible. We owe something to Herschel Feibel Grynszpan who showed us how, in this particular instance, it was not.

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The Handbell Choir

JANE FLANDERS

Twelve children, twelve gray geese in starched
collars, file onstage. Like their bells,
which are set out buffet-style on a long table,
they are graduated. The gym, with its folding chairs
and stale air, seems wrong;
they belong in a cloister or small pond.

The director, also in gray, appears.
They will play "Geese . . ." no, "Sheep May Safely Graze,"
in honor of Bach's 300th birthday.
Her raised hand, their rapt stance quiet us,
who suddenly seem to be listening
for a rush of wings. But the advent
is simply that of a sweet chord.

With a flick of the wrist, each bell is rung
then silenced on the breast. No hurry.
They take all the repeats,
arms rising and falling stiffly, like clock-work
hammers sounding over the roofs of Eisenach
on a March day for the baptism of the infant
Johann Sebastian. We think of sheep and lambs
in spitting snow. The church is clammy, water cold
on a baby's head, he cries a bit—
another miraculous, ordinary birth.

Having happened, the past is safe.
This is the dangerous moment, the melody passed
from hand to hand. Tirelessly, ancient-eyed,
they raise their bells as if in blessing, yes,
someone here, now, is blessing us.

JANE FLANDERS's third book of poems, *Timepiece*, will be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press in 1988.

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L. S. Vygotsky's "New" Theory of Mind

JAMES V. WERTSCH

More than half a century ago, a young man from provincial Belorussia burst onto the scene of Soviet psychology and dramatically changed its course. The story of his work and continuing influence is one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of Soviet science. Even more interesting, his ideas recently have increasingly had an influence on several disciplines in the social sciences and humanities in the West. During the past decade such American philosophers and social scientists as Stephen Toulmin have labeled him "the Mozart of psychology," placed him alongside Freud and Piaget as one of the "titans of psychology," and associated him with the newest trends in "post-positivist" psychology. Who was this man and why has he had such a lasting and profound influence on theories of the mind? To answer these questions, one must consider not only the individual and the ideas he developed, but the socio-cultural settings in which he worked and which he influenced.

I

His name was Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, born on November 17, 1896, in Orsha, a town not far from Minsk in Belorussia. When he was about a year old, his family moved to Gomel, a somewhat larger town in Belorussia, where he spent his childhood and youth. His father was a department chief at the United Bank of Gomel and a representative of an insurance society. His mother was trained as a teacher but spent most of her life raising eight children. It was apparently from her that Vygotsky acquired his initial knowledge of German and love for German poetry. Together his parents made the Vygotskys one of the town's most cultured families.

The picture that emerges from information about Vygotsky's early years is one of a happy, intellectually stimulating life—in spite of the fact that he was excluded from several avenues of opportunity because he was Jewish. He displayed an early interest in intellectual matters and as an adolescent became known as the "little professor" because of his practice of leading student discussions on complex philosophical issues. For example, he examined the history of thought by arranging debates in which his peers played the roles of such figures as Aristotle and Napoleon. While still a child in Gomel, he also began to show fervent interest in the theater, poetry, and literature.

Vygotsky graduated from his gymnasium in 1913; he was widely recognized as an outstanding student and intent on pursuing his studies at Moscow University—the best in the country. During this period there was a quota on the number of Jews who could enter Moscow and St. Petersburg universities: they could make up no more than 3 percent of the student bodies. This meant that all of the Jewish gold medalists and about half of the silver medalists could be admitted, and since Vygotsky was a gold medalist, he was confident of entry. But midway through his entrance examinations, he was suddenly faced with an unexpected barrier. The tsarist minister of education changed the procedures by which Jews were to be chosen for Moscow and St. Petersburg universities: the 3 percent quota was maintained, but Jewish applicants

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were now to be selected by a lottery, a change apparently aimed at diluting the quality of Jewish students at the best universities. Although Vygotsky attained a perfect score on his final entrance examinations, he thought his hopes for a university degree had been dashed. But in the end the incredible happened—Vygotsky was admitted to Moscow University by the luck of the draw.

Although his parents wanted him to go into medicine, Vygotsky was intent on studying law and soon transferred to that department. He was officially enrolled at Moscow University, but he spent a great deal of time taking courses at Shanyavskii People's University. This was an unofficial institution that sprang up in 1911 after a minister of education had expelled most of the students and more than a hundred of the faculty from Moscow University in a crackdown on anti-tsarist activities. Like many other students in those days, Vygotsky was drawn to this unofficial institution, where he majored in history and philosophy, by the presence of many of the strongest intellects in the country.

After his graduation from Moscow University in 1917 with a degree in law, Vygotsky returned to Gomel to teach literature and psychology. He lived in the relative peace of this provincial town for the next seven years. Little information is available about his participation in the Russian Revolution, but as it did for many other young people, especially Jews, it opened up new opportunities that were to motivate him for the rest of his life. In Gomel he taught literature at a local school, conducted classes on aesthetics and the history of art at a conservatory, and gave lectures on literature and science. Furthermore, he organized a psychology laboratory at Gomel Teachers' College, where he delivered a series of lectures that laid the groundwork for his 1926 volume, *Pedagogical Psychology*.

During this period in Gomel, Vygotsky was already beginning to have serious bouts of tuberculosis—the disease that would kill him in 1934. It was a serious enough threat to his life in 1920 that he spent a brief period in a sanatorium and asked one of his former professors from Shanyavskii University to publish his collected papers upon his death. Vygotsky recovered, however, and continued his work in Gomel. In addition to his many projects, he managed to read widely. Among the authors who figured prominently in this reading were the poets Tyuchev, Blok, Mandelstam, and Pushkin; the novelists Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Bely, and Bunin; and such philosophers as James, Aristotle, and especially Spinoza. Vygotsky also read Freud, Marx, Engels, Hegel, Pavlov, the Russian Formalists, and such philologists as Shcherba and Potebnya.

Everything that Vygotsky did up until 1924 seems to have served as preparation for an event in that year that was to change his life and the course of psychology in the USSR. This turning point was a presentation he gave on January 6 at the Second All-Russian Psychoneurological Congress in Leningrad. Although his lecture was framed in the technical terms of the dominant school of psychology at the time, it was, in reality, something much more sweeping. It outlined a theory of mind in socio-cultural context. Several of Vygotsky's future students were at the meeting and were fond of recalling the electrifying effect this unknown young man had on the conference. According to Aleksandr Romanovich Luria, a man who was to become one of the twentieth century's major figures in the study of the mind and brain,

> when Vygotsky got up to deliver his speech, he had no printed text from which to read, not even notes. Yet he spoke fluently, never seeming to stop and search his memory for the next idea. Even had the content of his speech been pedestrian, his performance would have been notable for the persuasiveness of his style. But his speech was by no means pedestrian. Instead of choosing a minor theme, as might befit a young man of twenty-eight speaking for the first time to a gathering of the graybeards of his profession, Vygotsky chose the difficult theme of the relation between conditioned reflexes and man's conscious behavior. . . . Although he failed to convince everyone of the correctness of his view, it was clear that this man from a small provincial town in western Russia was an intellectual force who would have to be listened to.

After this stunning performance Vygotsky was invited by N. K. Kornilov, the director of the Moscow Psychological Institute, to join his staff, which Vygotsky did later in 1924. With this move, Vygotsky's influence and pace of life increased greatly. In 1925 he finished his dissertation, "The Psychology of Art." This work, which was to become his first major publication, derived from a lengthy

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manuscript on *Hamlet* that he had completed as early as 1916. Vygotsky had actually begun the manuscript as a schoolboy after a production of this play had left a great impression on him.

The years between his arrival in Moscow in 1924 and his death in 1934 were extremely busy and productive. A group of devoted students and colleagues quickly formed around him and carried out a variety of ingenious studies under his direction. The general tenor of their comments about him years later reflect a respect bordering on awe. He seems to have had a profound influence on the lives of almost all of his students and colleagues. Professor R. E. Levina recalls taking notes on Vygotsky's brilliant—and often spontaneous—lectures, which typically ran for three or more hours, and understanding them only years later. Another of Vygotsky's students, Professor P. Ya. Gal'perin has recounted how "all of Moscow came running" to hear Vygotsky's clinical diagnoses and how students sometimes listened to his lectures through open windows because the auditorium was completely packed.

This almost messianic impression is borne out in many other observations as well. For example, A. R. Luria said, "All of my work has been no more than the working out of the psychological theory which [Vygotsky] constructed"; and of his own professional life Luria wrote, "I divide my career into two periods: the small and insignificant period before my meeting with Vygotsky, and the more important and essential one after the meeting."

From today's perspective, both in the Soviet Union and in the West, the excitement that Vygotsky generated among his students and colleagues is difficult to fathom. They were totally dedicated to the man and his ideas. According to Luria, "The entire group gave almost all of its waking hours to our grand plan for the reconstruction of psychology. When Vygotsky went on a trip, the students wrote poems in honor of his journey. When he gave a lecture in Moscow, everyone came to hear him."

Several ingredients were involved in generating this excitement. To begin with, there was Vygotsky's undoubted genius. A speed-reader, he was able to assimilate a vast amount of information into the powerful theoretical framework he continued to develop until the end of his life. Just as important as Vygotsky's genius, however, was the exciting milieu in which he lived and worked—the Soviet Union between the years of the 1917 Revolution and the beginnings of the Stalinist purges in the middle 1930s. In an important sense, he could only have existed in the time and place that he did. As described by such authors as Shiela Fitzpatrick (*Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931*), this period of "cultural revolution" witnessed unprecedented upheaval and transition. In the late 1920s and early 1930s the old intelligentsia was challenged as never before by young scholars and activists. In particular, it was challenged to incorporate Marxist theoretical tenets into all areas of scholarly inquiry and to develop approaches that would be of practical relevance to the problems facing Soviet society.

In this milieu Vygotsky was encouraged to pursue two related goals. First, he was encouraged to formulate a psychology based on Marxist tenets. Today's readers sometimes view his references to Marx and Engels as lip service of a sort required to get his writings into print, and indeed such practices have been quite prevalent during certain periods in the Soviet Union. However, for Vygotsky these references reflected a sincere belief in Marxism as he interpreted it. Along with many other young scholars, he was using Marxist ideas to reformulate and integrate all areas of intellectual inquiry. This does not mean that all these attempts succeeded or lived up to their professed goal. In this connection it is important to note that Vygotsky's account of mind was a mixture of existing psychological theories and Marxist ideas and that in the end there may be less that is necessarily or uniquely Marxist than he would have liked. However, this outcome in no way diminishes the importance of Vygotsky's sincere dedication to creating a Marxist analysis of mind.

The second, related goal motivating Vygotsky's work also grew out of the cultural revolution under way at the time. Like other scholars of his day, he responded to what Fitzpatrick calls the pressure "to focus their research on topics that were of practical relevance to society and the economy." These demands grew out of the dissatisfaction

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Vygotsky's generation had with the existing state of affairs in Russia and the impatience with which they approached the challenges facing them. These challenges were gargantuan. Vygotsky's generation inherited a country that had been through a world war, a revolution, and a civil war in the space of a decade. Furthermore, it was a country in which the vast majority of the population had long been rural and illiterate. The goal of Vygotsky's generation was to transform this society in as short a period as possible into the first grand socialist state. In the rush to do this the responsibility for directing academic departments and institutes, the military, factories, and ministries often fell on young Soviet citizens, such as Vygotsky, many of whom were in their twenties.

Along with many other young, energetic people at this time, Vygotsky made it his goal to help develop the "new Soviet man." In this connection it was essential to understand and create settings in which appropriate forms of consciousness would emerge. In the context of the continuing drive for rapid industrialization in the USSR, this translated above all into the need to create conditions for insuring basic literacy and technical skills for everyone. The challenge facing Vygotsky and his colleagues was daunting indeed, given that they were working in a country where literacy was rare, special education and services for the handicapped were virtually nonexistent, and dozens of major nationality groups were separated by linguistic and other cultural differences. Yet in those heady days of Soviet nation building, the challenge seemed merely to have further fueled the efforts of the younger generation.

Vygotsky constantly strove to integrate his efforts at creating a new theory of mind with the goal of contributing to the practical tasks at hand. The many sincere efforts of the time to wed general theories with practice were typically justified in Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, but as with many aspects of Soviet life, they also reflected a much longer tradition in Russian intellectual history, a history replete with examples of grounding practical efforts at reform in sweeping theoretical frameworks. This tendency has often been noted by analysts of the early Soviet years. For example, in outlining the major debts that the Bolsheviks had to the radical traditions of the Russian intelligentsia, J. H. Billington writes, in *The Icon and Axe*, that "the first and most important debt to the Russian intellectual tradition was the conviction that any alternative to tsarist authority must be cemented together by an all-embracing ideology." Being part of the same Russian intellectual tradition, Vygotsky and his colleagues operated on the assumption that only a grand, all-encompassing theoretical framework could provide the foundation for the task at hand—piecemeal proposals for reform were inadequate.

II

The all-encompassing theoretical framework that Vygotsky developed during the last decade of his life can be explicated in terms of three fundamental themes. In actuality, these themes are thoroughly intertwined in Vygotsky's thinking, and any attempt to distinguish them is somewhat artificial. Nonetheless, they provide a useful introduction to his ideas.

The first theme that runs throughout Vygotsky's writing is his reliance on a genetic, or developmental, method. The use of this method was motivated by the claim that any aspect of mental functioning can be understood only by understanding its origins and history. When dealing with this theme, Vygotsky went beyond developmental psychologists' usual focus on child development; in addition to ontogenesis (that is, life-span development of the individual), he dealt with phylogenesis (that is, development of species) and socio-cultural history.

All of these genetic domains were interpreted in accordance with Marxist theory, but the concern with human history in particular reflects this debt. In contrast to most theories in developmental psychology, which implicitly assume universal, ahistorical processes and ends, Vygotsky began with the assumption that the mental processes found in different cultures and different historical epochs are fundamentally distinct. Thus, his focus was on such issues as how the thinking and memory processes of a twentieth-century Soviet engineer might differ from those of an eighteenth-century Russian peasant or a preliterate Uzbek herdsman. Anthropologists, social and cultural historians, and historians of science have often investigated these issues,

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so at first glance there might seem to be little that is new in what Vygotsky was claiming. Unlike scholars in these disciplines, as well as most other psychologists, however, Vygotsky developed specific claims about how the concrete psychological processes emerge and, hence (in accordance with his genetic theme), what they are.

A second theme that runs throughout Vygotsky's writings is an assertion that higher, or uniquely human, mental functioning in an individual has social origins and a "quasi-social" nature. Here again, Vygotsky can be seen trying to translate Marxist ideas, in this case Marx's Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, into a concrete psychological theory. His starting point was a criticism of existing psychological theories, a criticism that is as relevant today as it was fifty years ago:

> Formerly, psychologists tried to derive social behavior from individual behavior. They investigated individual responses observed in the laboratory and then studied them in the collective. They studied how the individual's responses change in the collective setting. Posing the question in such a way is, of course, quite legitimate; but genetically speaking, it deals with the second level in behavioral development. The first problem is to show how the individual response emerges from the forms of collective life.

Vygotsky's proposal for overcoming this weakness appears at first glance to be paradoxical. He argued that only by going beyond the individual to society can we understand mental functioning in the individual. Luria succinctly summarized the claim at issue here in *Language and Cognition* (1981) in his statement, "In order to explain the highly complex forms of human consciousness one must go beyond the human organism. One must seek the origins of conscious activity and 'categorical' behavior not in the recesses of the human brain or in the depths of the spirit, but in the external conditions of life. Above all, this means that one must seek these origins in the external processes of social life, in the social and historical forms of human existence." Vygotsky developed his ideas on this topic most concretely in his account of the ontogenesis of the child. In this connection he proposed in "The Genesis of Higher Mental Functions" a "general genetic law of cultural development."

> Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First, it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition. We may consider this position as a law in the full sense of the word, but it goes without saying that internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships.

At first glance this set of claims may seem quite straightforward. But in making them, Vygotsky was making a move with profound theoretical consequences. He was fundamentally reformulating the way in which terms such as *memory, thinking,* and *attention* can be used. Instead of automatically locating mental functions in the individual, he was arguing that they can also be carried out on the social plane. The tendency for Western social scientists to speak of mental functioning as if it only goes on within the individual has recently been decried by scholars from several disciplines. This is the point of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's warning, in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), that "culture does not stop at the skin," and it is the basis for the observation by William Kessen, a psychologist, that American developmental psychology reflects broader cultural commitments—namely, its belief in the "individual and self-contained child." Despite such comments by eminent members of these and other social sciences, the tendency to locate mental functioning solely within the individual is so strong in Western theories of mind that there has been little movement away from it. Instead of seeing social and individual planes of functioning as being linked in a system of genetic transformations, there has been a continuing tendency to see them as two isolated domains involving separate disciplines or subdisciplines.

A third theme that runs throughout Vygotsky's writings is the assertion that higher mental functioning is mediated by socioculturally evolved tools and signs. Human language plays a central role in this regard. The importance of Vygotsky's comments on semiotic mediation (the mediation by signs

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and sign systems such as human language) has not often been fully appreciated by scholars in the Soviet Union and the West. This importance is reflected in biographical facts as well as in the role that claims about semiotic mediation play in his approach. As a biographical fact it is essential to remember that Vygotsky's first major work was devoted to literary analysis. This immersed him in the exciting philological and literary debates being conducted at the time by the Russian Formalists that were to serve as precursors to much of contemporary structuralism and other schools of thought in linguistics, semiotics, and literary theory. Vygotsky's concern with literary analysis was direct preparation for his studies of the semiotic mediation of mental processes; in fact, it was part of a tradition in which linguistic and literary studies were much more closely connected than they are in the West. Vygotsky's ability to integrate ideas from such disciplines as literary analysis, semiotics, and psychology reflects the intellectual milieu in which he worked, one in which scholars recognized few disciplinary boundaries. As an example of this, it is interesting to note that during the same years he was producing some of his most impressive work in developmental psychology he was also a regular participant in a seminar on semiotic theory involving himself, Luria, the linguist Marr, and the cinematographer Eisenstein.

The importance of tool and sign mediation in Vygotsky's approach is reflected in its analytic priority. The other two themes are to some degree defined in terms of it. In the case of genetic analysis, Vygotsky tended to identify major turning points, or "revolutions" in development, in terms of the appearance of a new form of tool or sign use. For example, building on the writings of philosophers and ethnologists, he argued that the emergence of *Homo sapiens* is fundamentally tied to the mastery of tools, and in ontogenesis he carried out investigations of the role of language in the emergence of new forms of thinking. With regard to the second theme, Vygotsky defined the inter-psychological and intra-psychological planes of functioning on the basis of semiotic mediation, and the genetic link that he saw between them was possible precisely because language and other sign systems mediate both.

It was in connection with this last point that Vygotsky made some of his most important theoretical and empirical findings. For example, he examined a form of speech used by children in which they speak to themselves as they carry out various problem-solving activities or engage in fantasy play. Because such speech is not directed toward others and because it disappears as children develop more sophisticated role-taking skills, Piaget had labeled it "egocentric speech." While not disputing Piaget's basic observations, Vygotsky disagreed with his interpretation of them. Instead of viewing such speech as a useless manifestation of cognitive egocentricity in the child, a sympton that dies away with the increasing ability to understand others' perspectives (that is, with decreasing egocentricity), Vygotsky argued that children's speech is a manifestation of the transition between social speech on the inter-psychological plane and inner speech on the intra-psychological plane. On the basis of a series of ingenious empirical studies, he concluded that, instead of simply disappearing with age, this speech form "goes underground" to become inner speech, thereby shaping mental functioning in a uniquely human way.

Vygotsky examined many aspects of mental functioning and semiotic mediation, but the transition from social, to egocentric, to inner speech provides one of the most interesting illustrations of how his three themes fit together into an integrated system. Genetic analysis is inherent in the claim that it is possible to understand inner speech only by understanding its social precursors and tracing the transitions they undergo. His claims about the social origins of individual mental processes are manifested in his insistence that speech is first and foremost a social phenomenon and that it is the source of much of the mental functioning on the intra-psychological plane. Finally, semiotic analysis is obviously involved from the outset—it is thanks to language that the transition from social to individual functioning is possible.

III

Vygotsky's influence on psychology and other disciplines in the USSR has had a checkered history. By the mid-1930s, he was clearly one of the major figures in Soviet

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psychology. For a variety of reasons, however, his official status declined shortly after his death and was to be revived only some two decades later. One of the major official reasons for this demise in his reputation was a decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union dated July 4, 1936, "On the Pedological Distortions in the Commissariat of Education." Pedology, which involved elements of psychometrics, educational psychology, and pedagogy, was closely tied to practices of mental testing used in the 1920s and 1930s in the USSR. Various reasons—some having to do with legitimate concerns over access of all classes to higher education and others having to do with the difficulties experienced by various party members' children in getting into prestigious schools—explain why pedology ceased to be a discipline or even an acceptable term in the USSR with the 1936 decree. Vygotsky had been quite critical of many of the practices associated with pedology and had devised some ingenious alternatives to standard forms of mental testing in his analyses of the "zone of proximal development." Yet he had written several publications with the term *pedology* in the title and was therefore no longer an accepted figure in official circles. The lasting influence of this 1936 decree is reflected in the fact that his publications about pedology have not been included in an otherwise quite complete collection of his works published in the 1980s.

In addition to the pedology decree there are other reasons why the Vygotskian School did not fare well in the Soviet Union between the mid-1930s and the mid-1950s. Like other disciplines, the paths that psychology was allowed to take were heavily influenced by the heavy hand of Stalinist politics. Stalin's statements about language and thought, which conflicted with some of Vygotsky's ideas, and Stalin's insistence by 1950 that psychology and several other disciplines had to be reformulated from the perspective of Pavlovian theory, sealed the fate of Vygotsky's ideas in those years. During this period of quiet for the Vygotskian School, his followers did not occupy major academic positions, but neither were they idle. Indeed many of them were very active in the nation building and war efforts of the Soviet Union. For example, several of them worked to develop new techniques for rehabilitating Soviet soldiers and citizens wounded in World War II.

The changes that occurred after Stalin's death presented Vygotsky's followers with new opportunities. Luria and A. N. Leontev led the way in taking advantage of these opportunities, overseeing in 1956 and 1960 the publication of two major volumes of Vygotsky's collected works and moving into positions of power in the discipline of psychology during these same years. Because of the centralization inherent in all aspects of Soviet life, the rise of the Vygotskian School at Moscow State University and in the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (also in Moscow) gave it great power throughout the country. Vygotsky's followers headed most of the major scientific and training institutes in psychology, dominated the editorial boards of scientific journals, and in general controlled many of the resources devoted to the discipline. Only with the death of Vygotsky's followers in the late 1970s and early 1980s has the influence of this school begun to wane.

In the West it has been only during the past two decades or so that Vygotsky's influence on social sciences has become noticeable, but this influence has grown to the point that major figures in several areas see it as an important force in the present and future. In anthropology and cross-cultural psychology, the work of such figures as Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner (in *Culture and Thought*, 1974, and in *The Psychology of Literacy*, 1981) has led many scholars to look to Vygotsky's ideas as a way to resolve some long-standing problematic issues; since the early 1960s Jerome Bruner has led the way in showing how Vygotsky's ideas can provide new insights into developmental psychology; and recently scholars concerned with topics as diverse as infant development, mental retardation, the evolution of concepts in science, and the socialization of political attitudes have turned to Vygotsky for new insights.

Why is it that this Soviet scholar is having so much influence on Western thought more than a half century after his death? First, one must again point to the fact that, in the words of Jerome Bruner, "Vygotsky was plainly a genius." He integrated and synthesized ideas in ways that have still not been fully fathomed, let alone put to use. But there have

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been other geniuses concerned with the study of mind who are not receiving the attention given to Vygotsky today, which forces one to turn once again to the milieu in which he worked and the one in which he is now enjoying his greatest influence.

Two factors here seem to be particularly important, and both of them reflect weaknesses in Western social sciences that Vygotsky's ideas might address. First, Vygotsky's writings provide an overarching theoretical framework, something that is sorely lacking in today's world of increasing disciplinary and subdisciplinary fragmentation. Although professional and institutional forces in Western scholarship are such that they tend to reward specialization, there is increasing concern over the lack of an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for understanding the human mind. The specialization in the social sciences can be traced to a tendency, especially prevalent in the U.S., to search for pragmatic solutions to local, isolated problems without being concerned with general theoretical issues. In addition, the technological expertise required to use new research tools, such as computers, makes it increasingly difficult for researchers to concentrate upon general issues. In part because he lived and worked in an intellectual milieu where these forces were not so pronounced, Vygotsky was able to outline the all-encompassing theoretical framework that he did. Vygotsky's tendency to think of every issue he considered as part of a grand theoretical system reflects an aspect of a long-standing Russian intellectual tradition of which he was a product.

The second factor that has enhanced his influence on contemporary theories of mind has to do with the role of the individual in psychological explanation. Vygotsky's claims about the social origins and social nature of higher mental functioning represent a fundamental shift in the way that terms such as *memory* and *thinking* are used; instead of automatically assuming that they are located in the individual, they can be attributed to collective entities as well. At first glance, this may be taken simply as an attempt to resolve a theoretical problem that continues to plague psychology. In reality, however, it reflects a much deeper, culturally grounded difference between the approach to mind that Vygotsky devised and the approaches that have held sway in the West. Whereas the individual is an obvious, easily isolable unit of analysis in cultural traditions that underlie psychological theories in the U.S. and elsewhere, the boundary between individual and collective is not so readily made in the Russian tradition. As a result, the idea that inter-psychological and intra-psychological processes might be inherently linked strikes members of the Russian tradition as quite natural.

This is not to say that Russians cannot understand individually based explanations or that Westerners cannot understand approaches grounded in collectivism. The history of psychological inquiry clearly does not support any such simple claim. The Soviet Union has had its share of psychological theories grounded in the individual, and in the West we have seen repeated attempts to create socially based theories of mind. In the latter regard, George Herbert Mead provides an interesting example. Mead, who was developing his ideas at the University of Chicago during the same years that Vygotsky was working in the USSR, continues to be held up as one of the major American theorists who saw the origins of mind and self in social life.

What is interesting about the fate of Mead's ideas, however, is that even though many psychologists have a passing acquaintance with them, these ideas have not been a major force in the discipline. Instead, Mead's influence has been limited primarily to sociology, with its focus on social processes. To American psychologists, the mind apparently continues to belong first and foremost to the individual. Thus, instead of being attributable to the absence of original theories, the minor role played by socially based approaches to the mind in America seems to suggest that the basic assumptions of such approaches do not strike Americans as obvious and natural, and this creates powerful barriers to the widespread use of these theories and to the prospect of their being tested by continuing concrete research.

Vygotsky's emphasis on grounding all research in an overarching theoretical framework and his refusal to isolate individual from social functioning make his ideas attractive to many American psychologists and other social scientists today. His are ideas that suggest ways out of some of the widely recognized

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dead ends that crop up in current approaches to the study of mind. Yet, they are also ideas that are in danger of being distorted as they travel from one cultural tradition to another. Such distortions are already becoming manifest as American psychologists try to use Vygotsky's approach piecemeal or to unwittingly "individualize" a theory that is grounded in inherently collectivist assumptions. The story of how Vygotsky devised his ideas and of the promise they have for enriching Western approaches to the mind is an interesting one; the story of how this theory of mind is serving as a proxy for one culture as it comes into contact with another may yet prove to be more interesting still.

Sunlight Snowfall

TOM HANSEN

One time, it came down.
The day, bright. No wind.
Fat furry flakes falling hard.

It hit the ground melting,
Dreaming of what was to come.
Water it sighed. And was gone.

Deep through the dirt it seeped.
Beyond where old bones collect.
Lapping along them, it laughed.

And wandered under the earth
Wherever the labyrinth led.
Away from sunlight and winter.
Back to where endings begin.

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Assisi

ROBERT CORDING

Even in February, the buses came and climbed the hill,
The delicate Umbrian light an angel's wing in cloud,

Glowing from some unknowable source in an Italian painting.
No wonder some gave a life's savings to see Saint Francis's

City of pink stone. No wonder we couldn't help but love
Those arching crypts, blue and storied as a child's heaven.

What we want to remember, we do. How he could keep on giving
His one robe, unashamed by love. How his love never failed

The sick, the poor, the criminal. Even a war in Arezzo
Simply disappeared, like rain into sunlight, Saint Francis

Undoing the daily harm no one could ever alter in his life.
The demons said to be in all of us laid down their weapons,

Taken by such tenderness. Everyone was forgiven in Giotto's picture.
Saint Francis went on, unable to sleep, so many blessings

Still needed to be given. He walked all the way to Mt. LaVerna.
When we close our eyes, we can see him hold out his hands.

The wounds bleed into them, and into his body, the marks
Of another life. From then on, he grew thinner until he was

Gone, his love absolute. But at least once more, someone saw him
Come back, robed in light. Giotto would have us believe

It was only a dream of what we cannot stop imagining.
We came back all winter, listening to the monks tell his story

Until, word for word, we could repeat it, like a promise.

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MEMOIR

An Afternoon with Agnon

A Face to Meet the Faces

BARUCH HOCHMAN

In the summer of 1967 I spent some time with S. Y. Agnon. Agnon had just received the Nobel Prize for literature, and I was in Jerusalem to work on a study of his fiction. A friend offered to put me in touch with him and suggested we practice a small deception in doing so. The master, he said, was leery of critics, but might be pleased to meet someone who could help with the English correspondence that had been provoked by the Nobel. I was uncomfortable with the ploy, but went along with it.

For better and worse, my meetings with Agnon were colored by our subterfuge. I take it that Agnon not only sensed the trick, but played it for all it was worth. The result was a fascinating set of visits that taught me more about Agnon than I would ever have expected to learn. What I glimpsed had to do, not only with the man, but with the work.

My first encounter, which lasted six hours or so, established all the motifs of my subsequent meetings with him and cast a curious light on Agnon's writing, partaking as it did of both its near-obsessive playfulness and its governing preoccupations. It is that visit, its oddnesses and the chain of reflections it triggered in me, that will concern me here.

Even the preparations for the visit were encumbered with oddness. The friend who had arranged my visit had told the Agnons to expect me at four. Another friend insisted on driving me there. She said she was doing so out of self-interest, since "there's no one in Jerusalem so interesting, so much fun, as the Old Man."

That made for a dilemma, and a characteristically Agnonic one at that. How could I, an unknown and invited guest, turn up with an uninvited guest? My friend, whose name was Lea, insisted it would be all right, that she and the "Old Man" had known each other since time immemorial, and had evolved a sufficiently jocular relationship to absorb the anomaly.

Still, more than a little nervous, I phoned. The conversation was odd. It hinged on nomenclature—on how you refer to whom—and therefore on the possible displacements of emphasis, role, and meaning that naming entails. As I talked to Agnon, it immediately became clear that I was being cast as "Mr. Baruch" and the "Old Man" as plain "Agnon." He would permit no "mister" to be appended to his name, and no other form of address was available. So Mr. Baruch, the wandering scribe, so eager to help with the mail, was to grace plain Agnon with his presence, and he was to do so in the company of a person known as "The Lady," and not with his old friend Lea, as most of the world referred to her. "Ah," said Agnon, cagey in his plainness. "The Lady? You want to come with The Lady? Of course The Lady can bring you. I'm always delighted to see The Lady."

It was startling, to hear Lea referred to as The Lady. Lea was a rangy, rawboned woman of about fifty-five, whose elusive girlishness was masked by the manner of the brusque British journalist. Lea worked as a newspaper editor, and she came on, often in Oxfords and tweeds, as an utter "original": an odd and passionately Zionist Englishwoman in the

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Middle East, picking her way among its perplexities. She was, in the end, a very great lady, but there was little that was ladylike, in the ordinary sense, about her.

Agnon not only referred to Lea as "The Lady," but played his relation to her ladyship to the hilt, and he did so to the exclusion of almost everything else, including me. Lea was notoriously unpunctual, but that afternoon she timed things to perfection. We drove up to Agnon's house on the stroke of four, to find a gallant but ironically abashed old man standing at a rusty gate, with a sprig of rosemary in his hand. "For the lady," he said, with mock Old World courtesy, and proceeded to acknowledge me—Mr. Baruch—with still more pronounced courtliness, as he ushered us into the house.

The house was shocking: shockingly ugly, shockingly stark, anomalous. On the whole, Jerusalem is built in stone and has a stony grace. The stone, at its most valued, is pinkish beige, and it is generally coaxed into pleasing shapes, with occasional touches of the arabesque. Since 1918, building in stone has been mandatory; before that there was no real choice. But there have been years when housing was short, so that permits were issued to build in stucco. Agnon's house had been built in such a year. It is a dingy dun color, with grim casement windows and the general shape of the "Taggard Fortresses" that the British built to pacify the country in times of riot. And though it stands in Talpiot, on the southeastern extremity of the town, where there are splendid views of distant mountains, tawny wilderness, and—afar—the Dead Sea, the house itself seems blind. Surrounded by dour cypresses, their plumage drooping, it orients itself to nothing.

What I saw of its interior matched the face it presented to the world. Agnon, still dancing attendance, ushered us into a room that, despite its fairly good size and pleasant proportions, seemed to have been displaced from one of the Orthodox East European quarters of the city. Against one wall stood a wooden wardrobe. A rectangular wooden table, with some chairs, stood in the center of the room, and another, smaller table against a wall. On the wall hung a framed map (or was it a photograph? I don't remember) of the Old City of Jerusalem, which had been restored to Israeli sovereignty—we tended to say "liberated"—in the course of the Six Day War about a month before. The one patch of color, or decoration in the ordinary sense, was provided by a shoulder-high, bright yellow-glazed tile stove such as I had never seen but knew was characteristic of Jewish homes in Eastern Europe.

Agnon asked me to be seated and signified the name, which I didn't catch, of a woman with a shy smile and a radiant, weathered face who was hovering in the room. The woman was his wife, though it seems to me that he didn't say so just then. She seemed pleasant but abashed, and she fidgeted about on her feet, not joining the conversation but not quite relinquishing it either. The conversation was desultory and chiefly had to do with refreshment. What would we drink? Juice? Tea? Coffee? Brandy?—Coffee? Well, he would fetch some, but would The Lady be kind enough to accompany him to the kitchen and give him a hand?

Quickly, Agnon, with Lea in tow, disappeared. Alone with Mrs. Agnon, I contemplated the strangeness of the setting. What was strangest was not the bareness—the barrenness, in fact—but rather the incoherence, not only of the room but also of the human transactions, such as they were, that were being performed in it. The plainness, the homeliness, the formlessness of it all was weirdly at odds with the man's work. Agnon's work is a miracle of restrained elegance; his stories are crafted with an architect's instinct for form. Only their classic restraint saves them from an almost dandified fussiness, such as peers out of old photographs of him, dating from the teens and twenties of the century.

What to make, then, of this deliberate eschewal of ordinary amenity, of every sign of ordering form? Partly, I supposed, it was a rejection of fussiness, of middle-class amenity—that is, of *balabatishkeit*, of the house-proud householderliness of a characteristically East European kind; partly, I thought, it must have been identification, not only with the shtetl, the small town, of his boyhood, but also with an older *yishuv*, with a mode of living—literally, of *settlement*—that had prevailed in *Eretz Yisrael*, the land of Israel, within living memory. Indeed, it was in part a throwback to something even I had glimpsed in remote corners of Israel, where people lived as they had lived thirty or forty years

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before and struggled to go on living in that way. But it was odd in Agnon, who figured—who still figures—as the most urbane of Israel's writers.

But then everything was to be odd that day, and the house, like so many other things, resisted clear explanation. One of the day's oddnesses was the length of time it took for the coffee to be made. It proceeded, the coffee making, with much clatter and occasional wisps of conversation. I sat there—it must have been forty minutes at least—until Agnon, with Lea alongside of him, reappeared. In that time, I had ample leisure to ponder the strangeness of the setting, the oddness of my reception, the unforeseen intimacy that Agnon seemed to be cultivating with my friend—and the distant loveliness of Mrs. Agnon, who had hovered tenuously in the room all that time.

Indeed, by the time Agnon appeared, I'd managed to engage Mrs. Agnon in conversation. The conversation was brief, bewildering, and painful, and it turned on a matter of time. As she stood below the map of Old Jerusalem, I asked—making conversation—if she'd been there. "Where?" she asked. "In the Old City," I said. "Oh, yes," said she. "I've been there all right—in '28 . . . I mean 1912. . . . But maybe it was before the War of Liberation. . . . You must forgive me. I've been in the Old City, but I think I can't quite tell you when. You see," she went on, with devastating lucidity, "I'm not very good about time."

It was clear that Mrs. Agnon was somewhat senile. She seemed to regard her condition as a fact not to be suppressed, or even to be embarrassed about. It seemed evident that it was beyond the power of mere senility to cloud the radiance of her native intelligence or to shake her essential poise, which seemed undaunted by age or distance or forgetting. She seemed a "clear" of the first water, and her dimness figured as the most transparent element in the scene.

Her husband was another kettle of fish. His materialization, with Lea at his side, was bizarre and rife with artifice. Both of them stood there in the doorway, each with tray in hand. Lea's tray, I was startled to see, was an old, oval cast-aluminum object, such as my grandmother had kept on her dressing table, with mirrored back and railing all around, for combs, brushes, and hairpins; his tray was a warped brass Middle-Eastern coffee server. The trays were piled crazy-quilt-high, with cups, saucers, sugar, creamer, finjan, brandy bottle, and glasses. Each looked like a prop for some deliberately comic improvization, to be rushed by some zany clown onto some safe surface, in the name of whole cups, unsmashed crockery, and psychic equilibrium.

But rush was just what he didn't do. Instead, he arrested himself in mid-motion and coolly addressed himself to me. "You know, Mr. Baruch," he said in a quiet singsong, "I was just talking to The Lady—I was just remembering," he said, as his tower of crockery teetered, tottered, almost crashed. "I was just remembering how, one balmy Saturday morning—Oh, more years ago than I care to remember—it must have been in the early thirties—one balmy Sabbath morning, I was sitting outside, in the late morning, and, looking up from my book, I saw, coming over the crest of the next hill, a pair of horsemen. Who could be coming to see me, I thought, on horseback, this unlikely Saturday morning? So they galloped nearer and nearer," he went on, with a querulous wriggle of his left hand and a Zero Mostel-like flourish of his left heel, as I dizzily eyed the tray of crockery teetering at the edge of the table, "until—would you believe it?—I saw my friend ——— on the one horse and, on the other, The Lady! And Oh! Mr. Baruch! She was so lovely, Mr. Baruch, so very lovely—you would not have believed how lovely."

There was something in Agnon's final tilting of the situation, after his consummately clownish buildup, that got to me. On the face of it, he was paying Lea a high compliment. But I was fed up; some contentious bone in my body led me to throw out, aggressively: "I bring a woman to your house, Agnon . . . I bring a woman to your house, and you tell me she *was* lovely!" I was at that point violating both the letter and the spirit of the situation, and I knew it. Lea had in fact "brought" me, and in any case the twenty or so years she had on me—she was in her mid-fifties and I was visibly much her junior—ordinarily prevented people from thinking of us in that way. But Agnon, having sounded the note of contention, rose to the occasion. "Oh, Mr. Baruch," said he, after a blank moment, pon-

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dering—"Oh, Mr. Baruch," he said, gesticulating vaguely. "She's lovely enough, lovely enough now, too—lovely, that is, for her age, for her years."

Lea, who had insisted she was coming along for the sheer fun of it and who tended to revel in the unlikely, the unpredictable, just beamed. Beauty was something she would rather be caught dead with than be caught preening herself on. Knowing that I knew that, she seemed doubly amused to have me enter the lists for her, and on those grounds. In any case, who could have resisted the spectacle of two such oddly assorted males locking horns about her loveliness? Beyond that, I felt that she was savoring the *chutzpah*, the *temerity*, I had mustered on her behalf, twitting the old boy in the idiom of a gallantry that his spectral Old World manner suggested. Nor could she have failed to savor the clownish wit with which he had wriggled out of the corner he had boxed himself into.

Bristling with amusement, the good Lea moved in, and did so with uncharacteristic housewifeliness. She insisted that Agnon put down his tray and let her organize the coffee. She had to get to work; because of her editorial chores, she had to get to the office by six, and she was determined to have the coffee she'd been promised, with whatever chat she might feast upon. So we sat, chatting about this and that: the coffee, its modes of preparation, the Nobel, Stockholm, Nelly Sachs, with whom Agnon had shared the prize that year.

What was stupefying about that afternoon, as it unfolded, was not its unlikely length—it went on for six stunning hours, well into the evening—nor its curious changes of guard, nor the oscillations of attitude, such as Agnon had shown toward Lea, but rather the number of variations Agnon played on the theme of lost beauty, as touched upon in that moment of reminiscence about Lea, and by my provocative retort.

Agnon was seeing Lea out when the next round of visitors turned up. It consisted of a fairly well known American journalist and his lovely Swedish wife. They had come to render homage to the Master, bringing pictures taken at the Nobel ceremony in Stockholm seven months before, and a chance to chew over their experience there. The wife—tall, blond, handsome, and visibly not Jewish—was received by Agnon with the same flutter of Old World gallantry as Lea, but more so. This round of mock-courtliness was the more comic partly because it was conducted in a kind of warped Galician German, which roundly declared its uneasiness in the speaker's mouth, and partly because the young woman was not inured to its ironic nuances. Watching the choreography of this odd courtliness, I again—as with Lea—had the sense that I was watching a comedy of wrenched manners, with the manners abducted from a variety of contexts, and parodied in a variety of styles. The pudgy old master, bowing over the hand of the willowy young woman, surely could not have been seriously *gnädige Frau*ing her. There was charm in the manner, and even grace. But it was the charm of parody, rendering the whole code arbitrary; the formality of manner seemed only a pretext for fumbling around her skirts.

There was parody, too, as he leafed through the photographs and exclaimed, "Oh! But this surely can't be you, my gracious young lady! This surely cannot be you! You're no less lovely, now . . . but so much older—and in only seven short months! Have you been indisposed, my dear? Have you suffered?" he asked with exquisite solicitude. "It must have been something awful that passed over you. Are you well? Are you happy?" The young lady fidgeted; only her husband's whispered assurances restored her composure, so that she could acknowledge the sharp-eyed gnome who lavished attention upon her and assure him that all was well with her.

And so we went on with the pictures: Nelly Sachs, the Swedish royal family, the presentation of the award. Calling attention to one of the photos, Agnon noted, with an air of astonishment, "And my old lady, look at her there. Such dignity. Such grace. Old woman that she is, even the doormen knew she was a lady—treated her like a princess. I don't know why. They must have seen the vestiges of the loveliness which once was hers." Mrs. Agnon seemed oblivious of both the compliment and the slight, so that, after a glance at her, he proceeded, with a flourish, to tell us a tale. The journalist and his wife were getting themselves together to go, but they *had* to hear this tale, this unlikely tale . . . this tale of great embarrassment such as he had rarely experienced before. You see, one day he—the Mas-

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ter, Agnon—had run into a neighbor of his, waiting for the bus. "Well, I didn't know that neighbor all that well. But I knew his wife. And seeing the two together, I figured it must have been him. So I said 'Hello,' said 'How are you?' and exchanged a few words. Next morning, to my amazement—I hadn't seen him for years—I saw the same man again. His wife wasn't there. I said to him, 'My, I was surprised to see your wife. She's changed so much.' 'My wife? Changed?' said he. 'Yes,' I said. 'Has she been ill? Has suffering overtaken her?' 'No,' he said, embarrassed. 'Not at all. That's not the wife you knew. I divorced her three years ago, and this is my new one.' "

And so on. After the lovely young woman and her husband had left, we had a glass of brandy and again chatted about this and that, Mrs. Agnon chiming in from time to time. Then more people came—I can't remember just who—but none of them, Agnon said, was the acquaintance he'd hoped I would meet, a Mister So-and-so, rather well known for his work, a Mister So-and-so whose wife was more than ordinarily interesting as well. About the wife, he said nothing in particular, but in that setting, in the context of all that talk of once-lovely women, the mere mention of her husband's name, of her very existence, sent lights flashing in my head. That wife was a woman I had once known quite well, and she had once (and forever!) bobbed her lovely humpy nose, cropped her mane of jet black hair, and forgone an ancient, haunting name, and all for the love of that very man, well known for his work, who couldn't stand her nose or her name or her hair!

It was marvelous, and maddening, but also tedious how often that day the Master touched on his theme of marred beauty. It hovered, almost palpably, in the air, as we ate supper together—Agnon, his wife, and I—in their kitchen, with Agnon serving the meager, characteristically Israeli evening repast of cheese and yogurt, bread, jam, and tea, and recalling bygone days, when his wife (still lovely?) could still do the honors herself; as I sorted a basket of mail with him, playacting the efficient amanuensis, the kind helper, and serving to bring to his mind some bits of lost wisdom his grandfather had bestowed on him; as he walked me to the number seven bus, so that I could make my way back to the safety of home, in town. And it hovers with me now. It was maddening, how it kept coming at me, like leering gargoyles in the tracery of a Gothic choir. As I watched it loom and weave and hover, it became increasingly clear to me that the mail we had "sorted" together had been sorted before—that the pretext of having me help him with his correspondence was as much a blind on his side as on mine. As the patterns of the day's encounters emerged, it seemed to me that the rationale of my visit with him—and his with me—was not those letters, but some obscure transaction between us that included, not only rival gallantries toward our mutual friend, but also a proliferating tracery of allusions to lost beauty: allusions that echoed each other across some obscure field of meaning.

Later, as I pondered the visit and its elaborate weaving together of the elements of a single motif, I found it hard to fathom what it was all about. At one level, Agnon's performance was surely triggered by Lea's presence, by something in Lea's relation to me—or mine to her—and by the trick my other friend had conspired with me in playing on him. Yet it seemed to me something more was going on—was at stake—and, in the aftermath, every effort to illuminate the transactions of that strange afternoon only made for further ramifications and involution.

Lea, for example, could provide a certain amount of information, but no explanation. Agnon, it turned out, habitually referred to her as "The Lady," but he had called her that only since he had published a story called "The Lady and the Peddler" some twenty-three years before. That story is about an impecunious Jewish peddler who finds shelter in the ruined castle of a Gentile noblewoman. He becomes her lover, only to discover one night, as she goes for his jugular, that she is a vampire. Lea believed that the story, which is generally taken to be about the Jew in the Gentile world, is also, somehow, in some dimension, about her own mother, a convent-bred English beauty who had converted to Judaism in order to marry Lea's father, who had been the scion of an illustrious rabbinic family, and whose ancestors interested Agnon. Lea thought, moreover, that the whole sequence involving her lost loveliness was at least in part a characteristically Agnonic joke against her and her family. Part of the joke was to refer to her as "The Lady,"

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as he has referred to her mother before her. As for the provocative anecdote about that Saturday morning, long ago, when those two figures on horseback had appeared on the horizon, etc., the telling of it had followed directly on a conversation—the conversation that had filled the heretofore inexplicable forty minutes of coffee making that afternoon—about "certain rumors that had reached" Agnon's ears. Those rumors concerned the very gentleman with whom she had materialized on horseback some thirty-five years before. That gentleman, to whom she had been engaged at the time, was said to be in the process of divorcing his wife in order to take up with her—with Lea—again!

It *was* a curious pattern that emerged from Lea's fleshing out of the imaginative background of Agnon's ambiguous compliment. The lady who had been, beyond present belief, so lovely and therefore doubtless so lovable, but who had lost her lover nonetheless, was about to have him restored to her, even in her present condition. And that lady's mother, who had in fact been indisputably a beauty, even in hoary age, was in fact not a beauty but a bloodsucker, like the lady in Agnon's story, and this was so despite her transformation from Gentile to Jew, and despite her long sojourn in the Holy Land.

Lea's playful evocation of the strands of personal history that may have woven themselves into Agnon's tantalizing network of allusions was useful. Yet it did not begin to elucidate the relentless patterning of motifs Agnon had achieved that afternoon or the behavior that had accompanied them. Ordinarily, I must confess, I would have been disposed to take the enactment, with its reiterated theme of lost beauty, as a super-subtle old man's way of dealing with his own grief and rage at the ravages of time. Agnon was, after all, crowding eighty, and other meetings—like one, some weeks later, when he cried out, on learning that I'd come with a young woman, "Oh! My dear! And I haven't shaved!"—suggested that he habitually parodied the outrage of a ladies' man at being, alas, out of the fray. His wife, moreover, was a bit older than he. Though she was markedly eroded by age, the very survival in her of both bearing and beauty must have exacerbated his sense of time and loss—the more so in view of the liver-spotted pudginess of his own person and the comic hotchpotch of his manner.

I had no doubt that what I had witnessed was in part just such a response by an old man to age, to time, to change, and to the losses they bring. Female pulchritude was the manifest theme, and it recurred in contexts of time, of change, of loss. But the direction that change took seemed wayward and suggested other preoccupations. Ladies could become vampires as well as old hags; but in the fullness of time, the haggard and haggish could, with a comic flourish, have restored to them the lovers who had presumably loved them for loveliness alone, and not for their blessed souls. Who knows, I found myself thinking, whether in a world where such transformations are possible, Agnon himself might not have been transformable, in his own imagination at least, into a young faun, much as Lea and I had been tilted—had been, in a manner of speaking, transformed—by Agnon's own trick of naming, into the peculiar constellation of roles we had enacted?

But something more than compensatory fantasy and primitive wish-fulfillment was surely involved, I felt. Neither Agnon's manner nor his glimpsed meanings lent themselves to such reduction; everything insisted that something more complex was at work. Among other things, what needed to be understood was not only the insistent yet elusive substance of his enactment, but also the form it took: the pleasure he seemed to find in embroidering his theme, and the wily impishness, however masked, with which he wielded it against his victims. Indeed, on further reflection, the way he shaped his material, combined with the substance of what engaged him, brought to mind decisive aspects of his work. In fact, the impulses that governed the comedy of deliberate recurrence that day seemed intricate enough to serve as a kind of brief abstract and epitome of his entire life's work.

Agnon's work can be seen as a vast elegiac, but also ironic, contemplation of loss. His first major story, published in 1908, when he was nineteen, centered on the pathos of star-crossed lovers, who yearn toward each other across an abyss of hopelessness, of loss. The story was called "Agunot," from the plural of the word *aguna,* which designates an abandoned woman, or a woman whose husband has disappeared without divorcing her, but

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who cannot be proven dead. Since Jewish law holds that a woman cannot remarry until she is either certified a widow or is properly divorced, and since divorce must be granted by an available husband, lost and absent husbands meant lifelong desolation, a kind of living death, tormented by endless longing, for the wives. Given the vicissitudes of Jewish life in the Diaspora, the *aguna* was a ubiquitous presence, a haunting symbol of unassuagable loss. Agnon, whose family name was originally Czaczkes, took that name when he published that story. "Agnon" thereafter served as his nom de plume—and his lifelong handle, the name by which everyone, even his wife, addressed him.

The taking of that name was no caprice; it was in fact a sort of prognostication of the governing concerns of his fiction. Those concerns all too quickly—some would say tragically—shifted from the personal to the historic. The loss that in "Agunot" seemed largely sentimental and romantic becomes, in the course of Agnon's creative lifetime, a communal nightmare. That nightmare involved the disappearance of the traditional East European Jewish world, first through cultural erosion and then by means of the violence directed against it in the Holocaust. A good part of Agnon's work is sustained by the impulse to contemplate, memorialize, and lament the passing of that world, whose decline had begun before Agnon's birth in 1889 and whose final resolution into oblivion was achieved by Hitler's Final Solution. Agnon's novel *A Guest for the Night* deals directly with the confrontation by a first-person narrator very much like Agnon himself with the disintegration of his Galician hometown, which—like Agnon—the narrator had left many years before. Published in 1939, *A Guest for the Night* may be taken as an anguished prelude to, if not a prophecy of, the Holocaust.

Loss, personal and communal, is pivotal, but so—as in the curious enactment I had witnessed at the Agnons' that afternoon in 1967—are transformations and redemptions. Agnon's work is full of transformations, of unlikely, often grotesque changes, but also of miraculous restorations. There are lissome girls who are transformed into sleep-logged beauties and then into runners who win their lovers as they race by the light of the moon; there is a pervasive lulling of men, young and old, but especially young, to distant music and the lure of absent women; there is even, in *A Guest for the Night*, the dreamlike transposition of a ruined House of Study to the land of Israel.

Operatively, the cultural loss that is the manifest concern of so much of his work, has its analogue—or, as I would wish to suggest, its source—in the loss that mere growth or movement or change must bring. Correlative with the partings, the separations, the loss, however, there is the meaningless movement of life itself, like the movement of the wind that, in the King James rendering of Ecclesiastes, "bloweth as it listeth." But always, again, there is for Agnon harmonization into form, where ghostly presences may bestow ambiguous peace on protagonists—peace that is ambiguous because of the way it mocks itself, because of the way that Agnon and his language relentlessly mock themselves.

Self-mockery is pervasive, generated by the irony that informs the work everywhere—even the work that deceptively presents itself as naive. The irony stems from what I take to be a cruel cast of mind that must perpetually mock what it most prizes. It is a kind of romantic irony that cuts down whatever it idealizes. Agnon's stories again and again evoke some deeply desired reality, only to shatter it in one way or another. So deep is the irony that the storyteller himself constantly subverts himself. Indeed, the personality—or the mask—of the storyteller in the fiction is not very different from the self-mocking, self-parodying figure I met that day in Jerusalem, the figure that so cunningly regaled his impromptu audience with so many and such grotesque references to lost beauty during the encounter that is the occasion for this essay.

No less striking, as I pondered the relation between my visit and his work, was that his fiction, like his performance that day, is marked by an insistent patterning, within which one image, one situation, one kind of relationship, repeats itself in a way that sometimes seems endless. All literary texts do this, but some do it more than others. If I were to try to place Agnon in the context of other modern writers, I would say that his stories are even more richly textured than Faulkner's, but probably somewhat less so than Joyce's.

The Hebrew text of "Agunot," for example,

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is probably less than four thousand words long, but it mirrors its governing motifs to seeming infinity. "Agunot" centers on Dinah, who loves Uriel, but comes to marry Yehezkel, who loves Friedel, and is hopelessly loved by her. But it also concerns Uriel, who loves his art, which is epitomized by the Ark of the Law that he makes, and that symbolizes the holiness of the Law itself. It has, too, the Law itself, which the People of Israel cannot adhere to but passionately crave. And it has the People of Israel, exiled from the Land of Israel, from Jerusalem, and yearning for it, even as it has the traditional Congregation of Israel and God, yearning for each other in the language of the Song of Songs, where the Shunammite so eloquently yearns for her lover, and her lover longs for her. But it has the Shechinah—the Holy Spirit as indwelling presence—too, who coos longingly for the People of Israel, who have been driven out from under its wings. And it has an old rabbi, who exiles himself from Jerusalem to wander in a kind of limbo, trying to mend the flaw in the fragmented world, which is symbolized by the experience of all the bereaved souls—the *agunot*—that fill it.

All this was suggested to me by the texture of my visit that afternoon. It was strange and wonderful how a piece of Agnon's imaginative world, as transfused into my own imaginative life through the medium of his work—and then in the medium of his enactment that afternoon in Jerusalem—kept tracking back on itself, producing and reproducing its structures and its themes.

In itself, it strikes me now, reflecting back on the reflections stirred by my visit, there was nothing surprising in this. Agnon's repeated washing back to a crucial set of issues—wishes, fears, obsessions—could be taken as a kind of paradigm for the workings of the writer's mind, which are, after all, no more than the workings of the human mind, any mind. Any single hour on the analyst's couch is likely to produce patterns very like the ones that Agnon generated that day; the only advantage the writer enjoys over other men is the ability to intensify and redeem such patterns by turning them into art. Literary criticism as well as psychoanalysis thrives on the mind's propensity for compulsive pattern making. Every artist, we tend to believe, has a set of characteristic obsessions, and everything he creates circles around these obsessions. We tend to ask not whether a writer has a governing obsession, but rather what it is and how it weaves into the work that is a vehicle for it. We tend not to rank artists by their capacity to free themselves from their obsessions and to engage the world as it is. Rather, we tend to value them for the range of elements (including language) from the world outside that they can pull into the current of their obsessiveness and integrate more or less effectively into their work.

In this perspective, what I was "getting" from Agnon that afternoon was one of many possible epitomizations of issues that dominate his art, but presumably his life as well: issues having to do with his peculiar personal sense of time and loss and recovery of what has been lost. What remains hard to grasp is why the whole thing had happened. Had Agnon sensed who I was—namely, a literary-critical clown, and a wickedly reductive one at that—and why I was there, so that he had reason to put me on? And if so, to what end? To parody my anticipated interpretations of his work? Or to point me to such interpretations—to intimate, in Henry James's image, the figure in his carpet? Or had it just been a tic, a twitch of embarrassment—or of irritation, at my rivalrous stance vis-à-vis Lea—that led to a heaping up of habitual motifs? And was he embarrassed afterwards, or tickled pink?

I don't know, and I never will. The question here, as elsewhere, is more interesting than the answer. What strikes me now, looking back on that visit and subsequent reflection upon it, is that I had witnessed something essential about Agnon. That something had to do with the paradox of the relation between the richness with which his material elaborated itself in his work and the relative paucity of those materials in themselves. This too may be true of all artists, that wealth is an offshoot of poverty and arises from assiduous cultivation of a more or less narrow, more or less interesting set of preoccupations.

About Agnon himself, it also strikes me that part of the process of generating the effect he achieved, both in life—if that visit was typical of anything—and in art, had to do with a teasing, with a playful nagging at his material, with an impulse to turn and turn again—an

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ironic *hafoch ba v'hafoch ba* (the rabbinic phrase for delving into the deepest mysteries of the Torah, to dislodge its all-encompassing truth, by turning over, and again turning over its every jot and every tittle)—what he held in the palm of his hand, till it took shape, till it found its sustaining form. With him, the turning was a teasing both of the material and of the person to whom the material was addressed, whether that person was a reader, or our friend Lea, or a gullible stranger like myself. That teasing, with its comical, sometimes self-abasing component, somehow managed to turn itself into mastery. Indeed, for me the main effect of Agnon's performance that day was the sense of a struggle for mastery—of the effort to stabilize the flux of experience, perhaps of time itself, and of the price in clownishness that he paid for such mastery as he achieved.

In fact, one of the things that struck me that summer, as I met with Agnon, was how costly, how tenuous, yet how remarkable that mastery was. The consensus among Agnon watchers is that in the last years of his life—he died early in 1970—he turned himself into a monument, reifying as mask the face that had once been his and that had once been projected, more or less spontaneously, as persona in his fiction. That, I realized later, was why his manner, like his gallant manners, had the effect of parody, of pastiche, of palimpsest. But overlaid though he was, to the point of encrustation, and inscribed with the fixities of posture and manner, his entire performance bespoke a vulnerability, even an openness—if not to experience, then to hurt and to exposure. That, I think, is what generated the bewildering encounter I have set down here. Presumably, it is out of such vulnerability, yoked to genius, that he created the marvelous cloud towers of his art—and the sometimes bizarre configuration of the face he in fact presented to the world.

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Caring New World

Feminism and Science

MARGARITA LEVIN

Science, it would seem, is not sexless;
he is a man, a father and infected too.
—Virginia Woolf, *The Three Guineas*

The past decade has seen one academic discipline after another re-interpreted by feminist scholars. The process began with the rediscovery and re-evaluation of female authors, and the championing of art unique to women, such as quilts and embroidery. It moved on to attacks on psychology, sociology, history, political science, anthropology, and of course biology as it concerns sex differences. Common to all such feminist revisionism has been an insistence on examining every discipline through the lens of a belief in the past and present unfair treatment of women.

By this point probably every academic in the humanities or social sciences has some acquaintance with the feminist version of his field of inquiry. It would, however, be natural to assume that feminists could not seriously undertake to accuse the physical sciences of "sexism" since those disciplines do not study human beings at all. But, it seems, a number of recent books and articles have launched just such an attack. Among the more important are Sandra Harding's book-length study *The Science Question in Feminism* and Evelyn Fox Keller's collection of essays *Reflections on Gender and Science,* as well as her earlier essay "Feminism and Science."

Sandra Harding explains why feminists have now begun to analyze science:

> Once we begin to theorize gender—to define gender as an analytic category within which humans think about and organize their social activity rather than as a natural consequence of sex difference . . . we can begin to appreciate the extent to which gender meanings have suffused our belief systems [and] institutions. . . . When feminist thinking about science is adequately theorized, we will have a clearer grasp of how scientific activity is and is not gendered in this sense.

The impetus for such an analysis arises from the need for completeness—"gender" must be shown to be a social artifact suffusing *all* "belief systems"—and, of course, from the need to explain away particular scientific studies that confirm innate sex differences that feminists deny are "natural." But the real threat to feminist ideology, it turns out, is the scientific method itself, with its promise of objectivity no matter who the scientist is.

At first feminists did not find it necessary to "reconceptualize" science so thoroughly. They were interested in restoring the reputations of (it was assumed) unjustly neglected "women worthies," in determining the distribution and status of contemporary female scientists, and in discovering what types of "social conditioning" prevented girls from pursuing or even wanting to pursue careers in science. At this preliminary stage—what Sandra Harding calls "the 'Woman Question' in science"—it was assumed that science was sex-neutral and that women could be just as proficient at it as men when allowed their rightful place.

It soon became clear, however, that—unlike art and literature—science has very few female worthies, neglected or otherwise. All that this was taken to prove, when viewed

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through the feminist lens, was that, in Harding's words, "women have been more systematically excluded from doing serious science than from performing any other social activity except, perhaps, frontline warfare." The idea that women have been completely excluded from science led naturally to the question of, in Evelyn Fox Keller's words, whether "the predominance of men in the sciences has led to a bias in the choice and definition of problems." (An example of such bias is scientists' ignoring such uniquely female problems as menstrual cramps.) But how a question is posed can determine the range of possible answers. If bias entered in the *definition* of problems, there might, as Keller notes, be "bias in the actual design and interpretation of experiments" as well.

This ever-widening hunt for bias was sustained by an unwillingness to admit that, as a natural consequence of innate sex differences, men might have a greater aptitude for the abstract, analytic thinking required for scientific discovery. That such a sex difference does exist in mathematics, which is at the core of modern science, appears to have been definitively verified by the Benbow-Stanley study at Johns Hopkins of tens of thousands of mathematically precocious junior-high-school-age boys and girls. Girls in the very top of their age group in mathematical ability, as determined by age-appropriate tests, are vastly outperformed by precocious boys of the same age on tests of mathematical ability meant for high school seniors. This study, and others like it, is unanimously disputed by feminists. In other words, the idea that science is a valuable activity that reveals the truth about the world, and is one in which many more men than women naturally excel, was unavailable to feminists. If men are better at science, science itself must be a distortion or an outright evil; something, in any case, must be wrong. Thus feminists reached the "'Science Question' in feminism"—whether science as practiced is so set in a masculine framework that women have been correct not to participate in it. "That the scientific worldview had its dangers was not a new idea," Hester Eisenstein writes. "But what a feminist perspective contributed was the realization that this stance was linked to male psychology and male dominance."

Feminist ideology has been seesawing between the claim that women's unique viewpoint will bring a *different* conceptual framework to bear on the world, and the claim that women will bring a *better, truer* set of concepts. The weight now seems to be shifting toward the latter, more radical end. Or, as Harding puts it, "The feminist standpoint . . . argues that man's dominating position in social life results in partial and perverse understandings, whereas women's subjugated position provides the possibility of more complete and less perverse understandings." Feminists have not yet explained how subjugation produces wider and clearer vision, a problem they share with Marxists. But, then, many feminists embrace the Marxist view of science as one more "social product" determined by economic factors, although they add a few slogans of their own. A good example is to be found in Lynda Birke's *Women, Feminism and Biology:*

> [Can] we achieve a more socialist science? This would, it is generally agreed, be a science geared more to human need than to corporate greed; it would be a science that is accountable to society, rather than elitist and mystifying. It would certainly not be a science that serves a giant military-industrial complex in the exploitation of nature, but would attempt to cooperate with nature. . . . [Feminists] would add that a more progressive science should be one that did not perpetuate in any way the subordination and oppression of women.

Many feminists who write about science from a Marxist perspective seem wholly uninformed about science, and identify "male" science with weapons and strip-mining, all intended for use, as Harding writes, "in the service of sexist, racist, homophobic and classist projects." No claim is judged too bizarrely reductive for them to defend. The feminist theoretician Alison Jaggar approvingly cites Alfred Sohn-Rethel's claim that "the emergence of capitalism, which necessitates the unending movement of money . . . generat[ed] the Galilean concept of inertial motion which is the fundamental category of Newtonian physics."

Some feminist writers possess quite respectable credentials. Evelyn Fox Keller received her B.S. in physics and is professor of mathematics and humanities at Northeastern. She has written a competent biography of Barbara McClintock, the 1983 Nobel

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Prize winner in medicine. Sandra Harding teaches philosophy at the University of Delaware. Their technical backgrounds, however, have not prevented either from reaching the most radical conclusions:

> Male scientific investigations were meant to pacify, control, exploit and manipulate women or to glorify males and their domination (Harding, unpublished paper).

> If the conception of objectivity is a parochial one, influenced by a particular ideology about gender, it is one which has served our particular economic and political history well. . . . It is therefore not likely to be radically transformed without, simultaneously, a thoroughgoing political and economic re-organization (Keller, essay in *International Journal of Women's Studies).*

> The Science Question critiques appear skeptical that we can locate anything morally and politically worth redeeming or reforming in the scientific worldview, its underlying epistemology, or the practices these legitimate (Harding).

These feminist epistemologists see male dominance at work in, for instance, the "master molecule" theory of DNA functioning; in the notion of forces "acting on" objects; in the description of evolution as the result of a "struggle" to survive; in the view that scarcity of resources results in "competition" between animals—in short, in any theory positing what they deem destructive, violent, uni-directional or hierarchical relations. The idea of dominance is directly linked to the notion of scientific objectivity, which, in current feminist thinking, is understood as synonymous with "distancing oneself" from nature. Harding writes:

> [Science] is inextricably connected with specifically masculine—and perhaps uniquely Western and bourgeois—needs and desires. Objectivity vs. subjectivity, the scientist as knowing subject vs. the objects of his inquiry, reason vs. the emotions, mind vs. body—in each case the former has been associated with masculinity and the latter with femininity. In each case it has been claimed that human progress requires the former to dominate the latter.

Despite the enormous scope of these claims, the actual evidence offered for the androcentric distortion of science is extremely thin. The centerpiece of historical support is, in Harding's book, the "rape and torture metaphors in the writings of Sir Francis Bacon and others (e.g., Machiavelli) enthusiastic about the scientific method." Referring to the new post-alchemy science, for instance, Bacon wrote, "I am come in very truth leading you to Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave." Notwithstanding Bacon's quite marginal status in the actual development of modern science, to say nothing of Machiavelli's, Harding seizes on these turns of phrase:

> Traditional historians have said that these metaphors are irrelevant to the *real* meanings and referents of scientific concepts. . . . But when it comes to regarding nature as a machine, they have quite a different analysis . . . the metaphor provides the interpretations . . . it directs inquiries to fruitful ways to apply [Newton's] theories. . . . [If] we are to believe that mechanistic metaphors were a fundamental component of the explanations the new science provided, why should we believe that the gender metaphors were not? . . . [Why] is it not as illuminating and honest to refer to Newton's laws as "Newton's rape manual" as it is to call them "Newton's mechanics"?

Harding is unaware that she has already answered her own rhetorical questions. The machine metaphor is fruitful; the rape metaphor is not. Consider the lesson that machines teach: what at first glance seems a complex jumble of parts can be analyzed into repetitions and rearrangements of simpler machines, such as levers, pulleys, and gears. In the same way, the seemingly irregular shape of a mollusk's shell turns out to result from the repetition of a simpler shape. Harding would not want to maintain, presumably, that rape metaphors have led to any comparable increase in knowledge. That is why rape metaphors are irrelevant to any analysis of extant scientific concepts, and why no one today speaks of Newton's rape manual.

The feminist case against traditional science also relies heavily on the observation that scientists are influenced by extra-logical considerations. And it is true—as no honest scientist will deny—that personal beliefs and desires can influence the research topics and even the methods chosen by scientists. (Lysenko's foray into genetics is a notorious instance.) Such deviations from the ideal of objectivity occur because science is done by human beings, not robots. But the self-correcting character of the scientific method, with its emphasis on observation, the replication of experiments, and open discussion, insures

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that such deviation will eventually be seen as such. Furthermore, as one moves away from such touchy topics as heritable traits and sex differences, the closer to the ideal scientific practice tends to come. For this reason, the physical sciences, traditionally seen as approaching this ideal most closely, pose the greatest difficulty for feminist theory. Harding, at least, acknowledges that critics will say that feminism "will not succeed in 'proving' that science is as gendered as any other human activity unless it can show that the specific problematics, concepts, theories, language and methods of modern physics are gender-laden—especially . . . that the mathematical expressions of Newton's laws of mechanics and Einstein's relativity theory are gender-laden."

Her reply to this challenge is, in effect, to refuse to consider it. Instead of actually attempting to show in detail that physics is "gender-laden," she asks, "Why should we continue to regard physics as the paradigm of scientific knowledge?" There is, in fact, a perfectly good reason why physics is so regarded: other sciences—like astronomy and geology and, increasingly, chemistry—are usually thought to concern special cases of the basic and universal processes that physics has discovered. Harding does not consider this crucial point. Instead she simply asserts that "we should understand physics not as the model for all scientific inquiry, but as atypical of inquiry just insofar as its ontological and methodological assumptions can in fact secure value-free research." In other words, physics is not science because it does not fit what feminists say must be true of science. At best, then, the feminist analysis is circular. But Harding goes further, and adds, "Perhaps in the science of the future, physics will be relegated to the backwaters of knowledge-seeking and thought to be concerned only with esoteric problems that have little impact on how we live."

This suggestion may appear plausible, because physics, like scientific theories generally, is not uppermost in the minds of non-scientists. That any two bodies attract each other with a force inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them makes no difference to people solving everyday problems. But imagine the law of gravity suddenly suspended, and you realize that all those practical decisions do indeed depend on physical laws being what they are. Ironically, Harding, the radical feminist, appears to agree with the traditional "sexist" who thinks that women's thinking is best confined to the practical while men should be off exploring the abstract and fundamental.

If physics seems devoid of "social fingerprints," mathematics seems even more so—more indeed than any other discipline. The absoluteness of mathematical truth also contrasts sharply with the vulnerability of conjectures in other sciences to revision in the light of experience. As one trained in mathematics, this writer was curious to see how feminist epistemologists would analyze mathematical reasoning, and indeed, the feminist treatment of mathematics is particularly uninformed and unconvincing. Feminists have not so far claimed that there is anything androcentric about arithmetic or militaristic about geometry: Harding draws back from arguing that mathematics is "*male*-biased." However, "it [is] plausible to regard as mythical the possibility of *pure* mathematics." She then goes on to give some examples that supposedly show mathematics to be subject to the social assumptions and conceptual frameworks of a particular culture:

> The ancient Greeks . . . did not regard one, the first in a series of integers, as a number, nor did they consider it odd or even. We, of course, think of it as a number, and as an odd number, because unlike the ancient Greeks, we are not mathematically interested in the distinction between the first . . . of a lineage . . . and the lineage itself.

This first example is unsuccessful because it involves a purely terminological point. Whether they considered 1 a number or not, the Greeks agreed with us that 3 + 1 = 4. There are no arithmetical calculations in which the Greeks got one answer and we get another. Whether "1" is honored with the name "number" makes no difference. Let us, then, look at a second example.

> Common sense tells us that a part cannot be equal to the whole. Thus it is only relatively recently that mathematicians have been able to countenance the idea that the numbers could be infinite in number. Earlier mathematicians' problem was as follows: one can match each sequential integer with an even integer (1-2, 2-4, 3-6, 4-8, . . .) resulting in an infinite series in which there are as many even integers as

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there are integers—at first glance an absurdity. How was this paradox resolved? Mathematicians were willing to let go of the common sense truth that a part cannot be equal to the whole. They did so by replacing the social image of numbers as counting units with the social image of numbers as divisions on a line. . . . A whole field of mathematical inquiry was made possible by the substitution of a different kind of social image for thinking about what numbers are. . . . Such a process of socially negotiating cultural images in mathematics is similar to what we do when we exclude patriotic killing in wartime from the moral and legal category of murder.

That last line is characteristically tendentious, but let it go. This passage is full of errors. To begin with, it was old news to Euclid that there were infinitely many *prime* numbers, let alone numbers (see Book IX, proposition 20 of his *Elements*). Second, modern mathematicians do not claim, as Harding implies they do, that a part is equal to the whole in the sense of being identical to the whole. Rather, they claim that a part and the whole can be the *same size*. What Harding may be trying to describe with her two "social images" is the entirely irrelevant distinction between ordinality and cardinality, between objects arranged in a particular order and the size of the set these objects form independent of the order. (Two infinite sets may differ in their ordinality but agree in cardinality.) The fairly recent discovery Harding has muddled is that there are different sizes of infinity, but she has certainly not shown that this discovery was influenced by any social consideration, and in fact there is no reason to think it was.

Most revealing of all Harding's confusions is her use of the word *social*. She has evidently run together the true and not very controversial statement that mathematical concepts began in attempts by "social" beings to solve practical problems, with the more dramatic but utterly unsubstantiated claim that mathematical truth somehow depends upon or is relative to social concepts. It is as if one concluded that, since art may have begun as a way of ensuring that what was depicted would in fact happen, therefore Dalí intended to have his surreal images come alive.

This claim about mathematics' alleged social heritage is, in turn, an instance of the first of three fundamental errors that form the basis of the feminist account of science. It is what logicians call the genetic fallacy: to confuse something with its origin and reject it on that basis. Even if, for the sake of argument, Bacon's rape and torture metaphors actually had been crucial for the beginning of modern science, that would have been completely irrelevant to the verifiability and accuracy of scientific theories inspired by those metaphors. Early astronomers hoped to predict men's future by recording the positions of heavenly bodies, but that does not invalidate the successful prediction of eclipses or the discovery of Pluto. Medicine began with attempts to cast out the demons causing illness. That viruses and bacteria have turned out to harbor no evil intentions does not invalidate the efficacy of vaccines and antibiotics. It is the same fallacy to infer from any male bias in the selection of scientific problems that the solutions to these problems offered by men are also necessarily "biased." Even if masculine interests may have led to investigation of falling bodies before the study of personal relations, it hardly follows that "masculine" dynamics itself is in any way distorted.

Feminists' reliance on the genetic fallacy is related to their second basic error, which is their failure to take seriously the fact that so-called masculine science *works*. Science makes predictions that can be and are verified every day. Whenever we throw a light switch, photocopy an article, or drive a car, we not only see technology in action, but also witness additional confirmation of the theories behind the technology. Feminists deal with this stumbling block by refusing, in one way or another, to admit that they have tripped and fallen headlong. As noted earlier, many feminists seem unaware that science is anything more than MX missiles conceived as embodiments of male aggression. What they overlook is that those missiles would not present a danger to humanity if scientific theories about atomic fission and ballistics were not literally and absolutely true.

Of a piece with feminist unwillingness to confront the success of science is a glaring failure to give any concrete account of what a feminist science would be like. Attempts to address this question have so far been evasive, to put it charitably. We find Elizabeth Fee writing in the *International Journal of Women's Studies* that "[We] can say that a feminist science should not create artificial

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distinctions between the production and uses of knowledge, between thought and feeling, between subject and object, or between expert and non-expert." And Virginia Held, in a review for *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, writes:

> Many feminists reject the goal of conquering or dominating an alien nature. A concern for living at peace with nature often characterizes feminism as well as ecologically sensitive thought. . . . [That] special closeness to nature that women are said to have . . . may provide possibilities for special conceptualizing and knowing, through the more relational approaches of women.

These promissory notes address only the more morally elevated attitudes that feminist scientists would, presumably, have and the applications of scientific results they would make (or refrain from making). One still wants to know whether feminists' airplanes would stay airborne for feminist engineers.

The only specific revisions in any currently accepted scientific theories that feminists have offered are no more than changes in *vocabulary*. This is the third and most serious error in feminist writing on science. They think that a change in words amounts to a change in thought. Consider the following passage, in which Michael Gross and Mary Beth Averill propose a replacement for the "patriarchal" images of scarcity and competition in evolutionary theory.

> Why not see nature as bounteous, rather than parsimonious, and admit that opportunity and cooperation are more likely to abet novelty, innovation and creation than are struggle and competition? Evolution in this perspective can be seen not as a constant struggle for occupation and control of territory but as a successive opening of new opportunities, each new mode of biological organization providing a new opportunity for still more diverse forms of life.

This reads almost like a parody of what female science might be expected to be like—all that has happened is that "caring" words have been substituted for "dominating" words. No new facts about evolution are being presented to challenge standard theories, nor can new words change the old facts (although they will certainly obscure them). Are the life-forms that become extinct as nature "provides new opportunities" to be thought of as happily yielding their places so that others may have a chance? Is the predator-prey relation one of cooperation? Did the apparently successful attempt on the part of "masculine" science to eradicate smallpox threaten the diversity and bounty of nature?

In fact, the whole idea of a "masculine" theory or problem is extremely dubious. If masculine scientific vocabulary and masculine modes of thought can only admit hierarchical and uni-directional relationships, how did male scientists discover mutualism and symbiosis in nature? Or consider another male discovery, the concept of feedback, in which a system constantly changes in response to signals it both receives from and sends to the environment—a very complex interaction. Or, again, consider the male discovery of catalysis, in which one substance triggers a chemical reaction between other substances without being affected itself. Could this not be said to resemble the behavior of a good hostess who introduces two guests to each other at her party and then moves on while they engage in conversation?

The point is that one can play "the gendered metaphor" with any scientific discovery. While it may well be true (although not for reasons feminists would admit) that on average men are more suited than women for constructing abstract theories about the extra-social world, the labels "masculine" and "feminine" as applied to those theories are themselves purely arbitrary. You could argue that Einstein's theory of relativity is more masculine than Newton's classical mechanics because relativity uses non-Euclidean geometry, a more abstract mathematical construction. Or you could argue that Einstein's theory is more feminine than Newton's because it offers no *absolute* reference frame for calculating time or mass, and it offers each moving object its own personal reference frame. One can play this game forever. Newton's conception of gravity as involving a *mutual* attraction between every two objects is much less hierarchical than Aristotle's, which placed the Earth at the center of everything. The Copernican revolution has generally been seen as replacing a human-centered universe with a more impersonal one, but Alison Jaggar claims that "Copernican theory replaced the female (earth)-centered universe with a male (sun)-centered universe." The big question is: does Jaggar think we have a *choice* about

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which theory is correct? Masculine or feminine, the solar system is the way it is.

One suspects that feminists themselves sense the emptiness of their enterprise. Those confident of their product do not strain to oversell it, yet much of feminist scholarly writing consists of wildly extravagant praise of other feminists. A's "brilliant analysis" supplements B's "revolutionary breakthrough" and C's "courageous undertaking." More disconcerting is the penchant of many feminists to praise themselves most fulsomely. Harding ends her book on the following self-congratulatory note:

> When we began theorizing our experience . . . we knew our task would be a difficult though exciting one. But I doubt that in our wildest dreams we ever imagined we would have to reinvent both science and theorizing itself to make sense of women's social experience.

This megalomania would be disturbing in a Newton or Darwin; in the present context it is merely embarrassing.

If feminist writing on science is so insubstantial, why pay it any attention? What harm can feminists do preaching to one another? If feminist theory had as little influence on the real world as the real world has on it, it could be ignored with impunity. Unfortunately, feminist theory has so far had all too great an influence in academia. Many colleges have yielded to feminist demands for special departments, courses, and requirements, none with greater legitimacy than "feminist science." If science goes the way of other disciplines, there will presently be demands for "subjective" science courses, for the adoption by scientific journals of guidelines for non-masculinist writing, for grading of female students that would be sensitive to their presumed non-dominant attitudes, and for denial of funding for "masculinist" research. Lest this be considered alarmist, consider the threat implicit here in Sandra Harding's book:

> If we regarded science as a totally social activity we could begin to understand the myriad ways in which it too is structured by expressions of gender. All that stands between us and that project are inadequate theories of gender, the dogmas of empiricism, and a good deal of political struggle.

Unfortunately, feminist theorizing is never far removed from "political struggle."

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"Civil Politics" in the Middle East

ELIE KEDOURIE

The expression "civil politics" can bear more than one meaning. "Civil" at first blush is the opposite of "uncivil," and this contrast immediately evokes for us the idea of manners, of norms of good behavior in polite or civilized society. In private life, good manners are learned by example, by the young emulating and imitating their elders. Norms are here implicit and usually unspoken, but that good manners involve following rules is undoubted. In social life, it is only when there is some lack or disorientation, or some breakdown in the customary transmission of codes that there arises a need for books of etiquette that purport systematically to set out civilized modes of behavior. Social intercourse is of course not the only field where rules are necessary. Rules, in particular, play an essential part in political life, but in contrast to private life, here rules do have to be spelled out with precision and made publicly available: rules of debate, rules governing forms of legislation or the conduct of litigation. When these activities are rule-bound, government is said to be constitutional. The range of meanings associated with civility thus becomes greatly enlarged.

There is another meaning that may be attached to the word. We may contrast "civil" with "military." The usage here is unequivocally associated with public affairs, yet it is not entirely separate from the earlier range of meanings. Military government, which is at the opposite pole of civil government, is by definition arbitary government. Such government is simply the fiat of a military leader, and thus the expression of unrestrained caprice. Whether capricious rule is good or bad, it remains true that it cannot be the government of laws. Military government, it follows, is less civilized than civil government.

There is a third meaning attached to the word "civil" that is probably the most important in a political context. We can use the word as Hegel uses it in the phrase "civil society." The phrase was used in eighteenth-century writings to denote a variety of meanings. Hegel appropriated it in order to describe a state of affairs that he believed to be characteristic of modern European life, to be indeed an integral part of the idea of the modern European state. Hegel's discussion of civil society is one of the most original features of his treatise *The Philosophy of Right*. And if we look at civil society as delineated by Hegel, we may indeed see connections between the three meanings of the word *civil* mentioned here.

Man, as Hegel sees him, is by definition free. He is such because he has mind and will. Who says mind says will, and who says will says freedom. What, however, makes modern European society so different from other and earlier societies is that in it man has become aware of his freedom. This was by no means always the case. Previously men thought that they were under divine rule or the rule of a master. They were not aware that each one of them is a focus of thinking and willing. What men always were in themselves, now in modern European society, they became for themselves.

But what, according to Hegel, is freedom? It is not simply the awareness that I can dispose

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of my own thoughts, that I am a free agent who can decide right and wrong for himself. This is not enough. Such freedom has to be externalized, to be made actual, and the first step in this direction is the possession of property. If you cannot possess property, you cannot begin to realize your freedom and must remain a diminished human being. Possession, however, remains precarious until it becomes a right. A right becomes such when it is recognized by fellowmen. Property thus implies mutual recognition of rights and entails the idea of contract by which property transactions are regulated. Contract in turn implies rules and judges who adjudicate quarrels between property owners according to these rules. A society of property owners entails also the existence of a market in which mutually beneficial exchanges become possible. The market gives men the opportunity to better themselves by exercising to mutual benefit their ingenuity and inventiveness. The development of man's ingenuity and inventiveness is also an enlargement of human freedom. The market, then, the field where men realize more fully their freedom, is what Hegel means by civil society. And it is in modern Europe that the institutions of civil society are most fully developed.

Civil society, moreover, serves to mediate between the individual and the properly political institutions that have to do with the exercise of sovereignty and parliamentary representation. These institutions are the guarantee of freedom that the market cannot on its own supply. Like the market, political institutions are fashioned by men for themselves and cannot endure without their continuous loyalty. The notion of the civil as it occurs in the phrase *civil society* is, then, much richer than that which is evoked by the contrast either with the uncivil or the military.

Civil society mediates between individual and state, between private and public. This mediation is absent in the polis where the distinction between private and public is unknown. For this reason, it would be utterly suffocating for modern man to live in a polis. The mediation is likewise impossible in what Hegel called the oriental realm where one man alone is free: the ruler who has everyone else in his realm in his control and at his mercy. Hegel's work here may be considered a summing-up and an articulation of the assumptions and organizing ideas relating to a state of affairs that has taken a very long time to appear in its full shape in Western Europe.

If such are the possible meanings of the term *civil*, how may one describe the prospects of civil politics in the Middle East? By Middle East is meant here the core area of the Muslim world, where Islam arose and in which it predominates. Of this Middle East, which is a region of the spirit rather than simply a geographical area, Israel does not form part. Jewish history and Jewish tradition are far too different for this to be possible. Since in human history things do not emerge fully formed from the waves, if civil politics is to have a future in the Middle East, it must have had some kind of past. If we start with the notion that man, though free in himself, becomes free for himself, or aware of his freedom, only at a particular point in his history, then it has to be said that this awareness of freedom is absent from the political tradition of the Middle East. What does very much exist is the awareness that there are rulers and there are subjects, and that passive obedience is the only prudent stance of subjects toward rulers. The Middle East is part of the oriental realm where "oriental despotism" is the norm. Here, as Karl Wittfogel has so strikingly put it, the state is stronger than society. Such a state of affairs has many features, a prominent one being that property—which is the indispensable externalization of human freedom—is here precarious. This can be illustrated from numerous countries within the oriental realm, in the past as well as in the present. In the Middle East, in particular, today as yesterday, expropriation and confiscation is a contingency always to be reckoned with. In the Middle East, as elsewhere in the oriental realm, wealth is primarily wealth in land, and in oriental despotism, land is very much the affair of the ruler, who usually claims a right of eminent domain over all land whatsoever. Here, the market, which does, of course, exist since people buy and sell commodities like food and clothes, is therefore very rudimentary.

In the traditional oriental despotism, there is yet a limitation on the ruler's exercise of power, since there are many aspects of life with which it does not occur to him to interfere. Along with his subjects, he takes for granted, and believes in, a cosmic or divine

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order that no one is at liberty to meddle with. A very good example is the *shari'a*, the divinely sanctioned Muslim law that, until modern times, it had never occurred to a Muslim ruler to question. The *shari'a*, however, had to be supplemented by edicts and rules necessary for the governance of an extensive empire—rules that can be subsumed under the general rubric of the public interest. What the public interest covers can be interpreted either narrowly or widely. On the whole, traditional Muslim rulers tended to the narrow interpretation. They did not, for instance, consider it part of their responsibility to provide for education, and it never occurred to them that they could engage in the political mobilization of their subjects.

Contact with Europe from the nineteenth century onward produced many far-reaching changes in the governance of the Middle East. This contact did not tend to the creation of a civil society. Rather, it introduced a form of government, equally to be found in modern Europe, of enlightened absolutism. This is the form of European government that traditional rulers in the oriental realm, the Middle East included, found most useful, most easy to introduce and operate, when they decided that steps had to be taken to protect themselves against the military and technical superiority of European states that was daily becoming more obvious and threatening.

Enlightened absolutism signifies that the ruler himself decides what is best for the welfare of his subjects and fashions society in a way such as to realize his vision. The vision is a benevolent one. It looks forward to the greater welfare and prosperity of the subject and to greater social harmony. The subjects cannot themselves provide for these desirable ends, nor are they even aware that they can be attained. It is the ruler and his servants, moved by this enlightened vision, who alone can bestow this boon on the society they govern.

With the spread of this ideal among the official and intellectual classes in the Middle East, traditional oriental despotism changed into something much more ambitious. The new style of government is meticulous, centralized, and in the end much more burdensome for the subject. In the last century and a half the scope of Middle Eastern government, and the burdens it has imposed on the subjects, has grown by leaps and bounds, and those groups in Middle Eastern society that, for one reason or another, had enjoyed some autonomous existence, now find themselves under the control of centralizing governments. This has been the fate of nomadic tribes and of non-Muslim communities. These latter had traditionally been allowed communal self-government and their own communal courts. Their status was of course inferior to that of the Muslims, but provided they kept the peace and paid their taxes, the rulers generally left them alone. As for the nomads, their freedom from control owed much to the fact that the writ of traditional rulers was difficult to enforce in the outlying regions where Bedouins and other nomads dwelt. But the logic of centralization required the gradual weakening and eventual emasculation of communal organization, while the much more powerful weapons now at the disposal of government destroyed the freedom of the nomads that nonexistent roads, ramshackle communications, and the tribesman's simple rifle had hitherto defended.

But centralization and enlightenment did not, in the event, produce the greater strength and prosperity that they had promised. Governments have attempted to do much more than they had ever done and have failed. The disappointment of these hopes has led, in the twentieth century, to military coups d'état organized by enlightened, Westernized officers. These had become progressively more disenchanted with the result of European-style reforms, and attributed their failure to greed and corruption. Whether it is the Young Turks in 1908–1909 or Nasser in 1952, the impulse is the same. It is to apply heroic remedies and sweep away with a forcible gesture all the obstructions standing in the way of a good life. The result of these interventions was paradoxical, since the intent was to progress toward more orderly, more accountable government, while the unavoidable result was a regression toward military caprice and arbitrariness.

Another, related, aspect of politics in the modern Middle East is the prevalence, which follows from the character of military rule, of one-party regimes. The expression is itself paradoxical since the very word assumes and indicates variety and multiplicity. These so-called one-party regimes are associated with

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the rise of modern military governments. Some of these regimes have emulated European models, like the German National Socialist party, or the Soviet Communist party, and have aspired to penetrate and control all social, economic, and even familial organizations. The Ba'ath Party both in Iraq and in Syria has been fairly successful in this endeavor. If the Ba'ath and similar parties have not been as successful as they had hoped, this was because they were frustrated by indolence, incompetence, and corruption. These fortunately provide small interstices within which privacy and private interests can find refuge and protection.

A comparatively recent development has served to increase greatly in some countries the power and reach of government. Modern Western enterprise has developed the Middle Eastern oil industry, but the consequence in recent years has been to transform the governments benefiting from the prodigious oil revenues into the father and mother of the populations over whom they hold sway. Such a development is in the logic of oriental despotism, but one which, in the absence of sufficient resources at the rulers' disposal, could not hitherto be realized.

If a civil polity is one that is rule-governed, and if it is asked whether a polity of this kind has a future in the Middle East, then we have to say that it hardly has a present, and that it certainly did not have a past. The slight qualification has to be made because of the record of two states, namely Lebanon and Turkey. Lebanon did in fact become a polity endowed with a civil society, but with the removal of Western power and influence from the Middle East, the polity proved too weak to withstand the assault of more powerful neighbors, and it is now well-nigh destroyed.

As for Turkey, until 1918, it was the center of the Ottoman Empire, a great oriental despotism. It was also in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the theater of all these experiments in enlightened absolutism, whether by the sultans or by the Young Turks. After the destruction of the empire, the experiments were continued by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the republic who culminated in his own person the Young Turk ideals and attitudes. The regime that he established survived until the late 1940s. With the elections of 1950—which were genuine elections—a constitutional, representative, and parliamentary regime came into being. But this regime has experienced a military coup d'état in 1960 and 1980, and a semi-coup in 1971. It has survived these incidents, but that they happened indicates how precarious civil politics remains in Turkey. Thus, with all kinds of caveats and hesitations one may conclude that here are indications of a new, as yet frail, kind of Middle Eastern polity that may approximate to what Hegel had in mind when he was describing civil society and the state that goes with it and in which it can thrive.

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Lewis Mumford

From the Belly of the Whale

WILFRED M. McCLAY

On the evening of December 13, 1972, Lewis Mumford was awarded the National Medal for Literature, a crowning honor recognizing his many contributions to a wide variety of fields, ranging from literary history to urban planning. In his acceptance speech, Mumford waxed metaphorical, comparing himself to the biblical prophet Jonah, whom God had called to admonish the people of Nineveh, alerting them to the dire impending consequences of their extreme wickedness. In some respects, the comparison seemed apt, if more than a touch immodest, for Mumford's vocation has come in the past three decades increasingly to resemble that of a prophet—an indefatigable scolding voice, crying in the wilderness of modern technological civilization, mocking what he sees as its absurdities and deformations, warning us of the apocalyptic fate we will surely suffer if we do not heed his, Lewis Mumford's, prescriptions.

Still, there are important differences between the two prophets. Jonah was a prophet without honor, who at first tried to flee from his prophetic tasks; for that sin, he suffered his sojourn in the great whale. Then, once he had submitted to his fate and gone to Nineveh, Jonah found his prophecies heeded by the Lord's intended victims, whereby the Lord decided—much to Jonah's disgust—to spare them. Mumford, however, has delighted in the role of prophet, embracing it more and more eagerly as his career went on, and garnering along the way an impressive array of honorary degrees, book awards, memberships in prestigious academies and institutes, visiting professorships, and like honors and distinctions. In an era that has a seemingly boundless appetite for dark images of apocalypse—an appetite that will no doubt increase as the millennium approaches—Mumford has been a prophet with plenty of honor.

Yet it is one of the singular mysteries of his career, again in marked contrast to the biblical Jonah, that Mumford's palpable influence has in the end been so slight. Despite the publication of more than thirty books over a sixty-year span, despite the many evidences of public recognition, Mumford somehow has the air about him of a back number, a middlebrow sage whose work places him dangerously close to the likes of Will Durant, Erich Fromm, and Norman Cousins, and hence beneath the consideration of serious thinkers. This is almost certainly an unfair assessment, for much of Mumford's work, particularly that dealing with the history of American culture or with the history of cities, has great value, both for the general reader and for specialists in the fields in question.

Undoubtedly, Mumford's influence has been diminished by the decline of the educated general reader—the kind of reader for whom he always wrote—in the face of an increasingly fragmented, specialized, and jargon-ridden intellectual world. Still, whatever the causes, the sense persists that Mumford is an impressive and energetic writer whose work nonetheless seems somehow beside the point. One looks in vain for any unmistakable signs of his lasting influence in the many fields to which he addressed himself: biography, social thought, urban planning, art, archi-

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tecture, history, literature, and technology. Unlike Jonah, Mumford has been a prophet honored but unheeded.

Lewis Mumford did not set out to be a prophet. Instead, the young Mumford seems to have cherished the role of all-purpose freelance cultural critic, a vocation that bespeaks the very special time and place in which his ideas began to emerge. For Mumford came of intellectual age in the heady years around the First World War, in a New York intellectual milieu presided over by such eminent iconoclasts as H. L. Mencken, Theodore Dreiser, Thorstein Veblen, Sinclair Lewis, Isadora Duncan, Ernest Hemingway, Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne, and John Reed. Whatever their differences on matters of politics or morals, this generation saw eye-to-eye on one matter: the need to discard the stodgy, derivative aesthetic of Anglo-Saxon middle-class propriety and to put in its place an aesthetic of vibrant, defiant authenticity. Cluttered bourgeois parlors became anathema, and a campaign to sweep away musty, out-of-date Victorian precepts also seemed obligatory.

Such a clarion call resounded compellingly in the ears of a young man growing up in Mumford's circumstances. He was a lonely and self-contained child, raised by his mother alone, the unwelcome product of a tangled and ill-starred romance. His mother tried to keep up the appearance of middle-class solidity, even as it seemed to slip away, by lavishing her attentions upon her homes' interiors—overstuffed, gilded prisons to which the heavy oppression of late-Victorian decorative taste clung like a stale odor. In those days, no more damning accusation could be hurled at a conscientious homemaker than that her interiors were bare. Every available square inch of wall space, even in kitchens, bathrooms, and hallways, was to be covered with ornately framed sentimental paintings, engravings, or wall hangings, while every horizontal surface was laden with doilies, embroidery, tapestries, lamps, ashtrays, vases, statuettes, and all other imaginable objects d'art. Overflow bric-a-brac would be hoarded away in the obligatory china closets or curio cabinets artfully shoehorned into corners and dead spaces. "The visual clutter," Mumford remembered, "even included the windows: they must not be bare either." To prevent this, there were "wooden shutters that folded back into the walls, there were roller shades, too, and there were lace curtains that reached to the floor, usually with heavy drapes covering them."

Such, Mumford recalled, were the "chambers of esthetic horror" in which he and his generation were brought up. Small wonder, then, that it turned out to be a generation of rebels, determined to tear away both the decorative falsehoods and the social falsehoods they symbolized. All around him, Mumford saw the invigorating evidences of mental and moral spring-cleaning. In 1919, the year Mumford turned twenty-four, Mencken assaulted American pieties in his first volume of *Prejudices,* while the footloose Reed breathlessly recounted *Ten Days That Shook the World* to a readership of bohemian radicals and curious liberals. A year later, Sinclair Lewis published his acid satire of middle-class America, *Main Street;* Hemingway was gradually unveiling his celebrated prose style, a perfect verbal complement to uncluttered post-Victorian interiors; and Brooks was exploring the literary debilitation wrought by American gentility in his *Ordeal of Mark Twain.* When Harold Stearns drew together many of the brightest talents of the era—including Mencken, Brooks, George Jean Nathan, George Soule, and Ring Lardner—for a landmark symposium volume of astringent cultural criticism, *Civilization in the United States* (1922), Mumford supplied the lead article "The City." In that same year, Mumford published the first of his many books, *The Story of Utopias,* a work still in print today.

The sharp tone of cultural criticism in those days has led some observers to posit a strain of European-style post-war disillusionment lurking beneath American intellectuals' pronouncements. But this strain has been greatly exaggerated, principally through fanciful tales of a lost generation comprising beautiful and damned rebels. On the contrary, the war that devastated Europe had left American society largely unscathed, so much so that many reform-minded American intellectuals naively saw the aftermath of the Great War as a Great Opportunity to remake the world. However much they loathed the Presbyterian moralism of President Woodrow Wilson, their own confident progressivism had elements in common with his. "Reconstruction," as Mumford re-

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membered, "carried the hopeful notion that the war had given each country such a jolt that every institution, shaken off its ancient base, would be searchingly re-examined and reshaped on a more humane pattern—as if the invisible structure of men's minds were as accessible and as open to reorganization or replacement as shell-pocked fields or broken-down bridges."

America's relative stability, moreover, imparted invisible momentum to the confidence of even the most radical thinkers; one could blithely challenge the sky to fall, without ever seriously considering the consequences if it did. The comforts of the overstuffed parlor may have appalled the youthful creative spirit in some respects, but its protective insulation ironically served to foster an energizing illusion: that by stripping away phoniness, gentility, and sentimentality, one released the elemental and organic nature of things to express themselves freely and embraced life in all of its naked and friendly purity.

Anxious to make an independent name for themselves, the intellectuals of Mumford's generation smashed away mercilessly at the "genteel" culture of the late nineteenth century. They were determined to reach around it, to discover rawer, more vital, more unmediated, more authentically American ways of seeing, writing, and thinking. Hence the seeming paradox that some of the country's fiercest cultural critics, men such as Mencken, Brooks, and Mumford, were also fiercely dedicated to the recovery and appreciation of indigenous elements and talents—an effort that Brooks had spearheaded with his manifesto *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915), and to which Mencken made a spectacular contribution with the publication of his monumental *The American Language* (1919). Constance Rourke, deeply influenced by Herder's romantic belief in the nurturing effects of the *Volksgeist*, began collecting and interpreting American folktales and examples of regional humor, convinced that these constituted a precious national resource whose value was yet to be fully appreciated and assimilated.

For his part, Mumford turned primarily to American philosophy, literature, and architecture for his inspiration. He found sustenance in the visionary optimism of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the democratic openness to experience of Walt Whitman, the fidelity to organic form of Horatio Greenough and Henry David Thoreau, and the brawling cosmic drama of Herman Melville. Here were authentically American voices, explorers of a New World, the first brave cartographers of "a new hemisphere in the geography of the mind"; it was to them that Mumford's most important early book, *The Golden Day* (1926), is dedicated. "Euclid Alone Has Looked On Beauty Bare," asserted the title of Edna St. Vincent Millay's sonnet; but the sentiment was not entirely new. For to possess genuine beauty in our lives, Thoreau had asserted many years before, "the walls must be stripped, and our lives must be stripped."

As Mumford made clear in *The Golden Day*, the proper reorientation of American life and taste would have to include a new relationship to the machine. Genteel taste merely evaded the machine's influence by covering it up, in much the same way that Victorian homemakers had dressed up their walls with superfluous decor. Not only did this reflect a dishonest and mistaken vision of the machine, but it betokened a missed opportunity for America to grasp hold of the cultural identity she had so long sought. Such splendid engineering achievements as Roebling's Brooklyn Bridge were distinctively American masterpieces, artfully combining usefulness with unaffected beauty. Rather than ignoring the machine, Americans ought to appropriate its virtues, creating designs that were "clean, devoid of archaic ornament, polished, efficient, carefully adapted to every human need, humane, [and] friendly."

With these remarks, Mumford seemed to place himself in a long American tradition of stripped-down organic functionalism, exemplified by the precepts of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, by the thought of Emerson, Thoreau, and Greenough, by the sturdy republican virtues extolled in the Revolutionary generation, and even by the "plain style" of the New England Puritan ministers. Form ought to follow function; simplicity and honesty were to be preferred to ornamental evasion. Any beauty worthy of the name must inhere in the honest structure of things; modern man should be willing to forego the cosmetic falsehoods that accumulate, like so many barnacles, upon living form. Mumford promoted this functionalist aesthetic with great vigor during the twenties, and the pro-

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fusion of books that began to pour forth from his pen already showed the impressive interdisciplinary breadth that would become his hallmark.

The remaking of American culture, then, was a central concern to the young Mumford. His *Sticks and Stones* (1924) and *The Brown Decades* (1931) were revisionist studies of American architecture. His *Herman Melville* (1929), following in the footsteps of Raymond Weaver's pioneering biography, sought to restore a neglected American genius to his proper world-class stature. His *Golden Day* tried to isolate the genius of American culture, locating it in the broad history of European civilization and thus providing a background against which the American future could be properly estimated. "The settlement of America had its origins," he asserted, "in the unsettlement of Europe." The alchemy wrought by transatlantic distance made it possible for the most "modern" fragments of European civilization, embodied in the "restless, delocalized" American man, to be transformed into an entirely new culture, one that could take root without interference from other fragments of a disintegrating medieval synthesis. It required the genius of a man like Emerson, who "divested everything of its associations, and seized it afresh," to grasp the possibilities inherent in the "modern basis for culture," a basis much "nearer to the formative thinkers and poets of the past, than those who sought to restore the past."

In such passages, Mumford seemed a relentless and cheerful modernizer, working within the anti-traditional tradition of the modern era's great unmaskers. America was a living reproach to the timid and hidebound ways of Europe; it evinced a kind of "creative barbarism, a barbarism that aimed to use the old buildings not as a shell, but as a quarry; neither casting them aside altogether, nor attempting wretchedly to fit a new and lush existence into the old forms." Like his close friend Van Wyck Brooks, Mumford sought a "usable past," a past that informed the pursuits of the present but was fluid enough to keep from constraining them.

That usable past, however, rarely included the recent past of industrial America. There were passages in Mumford, even as early as *The Golden Day*, that indicate a darkening assessment of modern industrial America, an assessment resembling that of other intellectual modernizers of the twenties, such as Hemingway, Cather, and Eliot, who sought refuge from the present in an idealized conception of pre-modern Christendom. Such passages in Mumford may have owed more to the apocalyptic visions of Henry Adams than to the ebullience of Emerson—and not coincidentally, for *The Education of Henry Adams*, posthumously published in 1918, was a major intellectual presence in the twenties, and Mumford was always among the book's greatest admirers.

Adams himself traced American decline to the Civil War, which marked the defeat of the public-spirited eighteenth-century republican man, and the triumph of the self-aggrandizing man on the make. In such works as his political novel *Democracy*, as well as the *Education*, Adams had sketched a doleful curve of moral and spiritual decline whose trajectory would have been instantly recognizable to his Puritan ancestors. Mumford saw things much the same way. The Civil War, though begun in Homeric glory, had "a Punic ending," Mumford lamented, for it became "a struggle between two forms of servitude, the slave and the machine." Although the latter won, "the human spirit was almost as much paralyzed by the victory as it would have been by the defeat . . . [and] the justifiable antebellum optimism of Emerson turned into a waxen smile." Far from winning mastery over the machine, postbellum America became its tragic victim. It had consented to bow before a terrible new god, just as Henry Adams had affected a prayer before the great dynamo at the Paris Exposition of 1900.

Mumford, then, felt profound ambivalence about the machine from the beginning of his career, long before he came to write such bloated anti-technological tirades as *The Pentagon of Power* (1970). Such ambivalence, not surprisingly, was reflected in his understanding of American civilization. The same Emersonian elements that made for America's glory, it seemed, also made for its shame. The qualities of mind that formed the basis of Protestant theology, modern social and political thought, modern finance, modern science, and modern technology, enjoyed almost undiluted expression in the prototypical America, Mumford thought. Such qualities were indispensable, of course, for the conquest of an

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untamed nature and the advancement of man's material existence; but a one-sided emphasis upon such qualities, as embodied in the "restless delocalized" American, might undermine the possibility of human community itself, and thus of a fully realized human existence.

In this respect, too, Mumford's thinking recalls Adams's contrast between the unity of thirteenth-century civilization—whose life was held within the orbit of the cathedral, under the benign countenance of the Virgin Mary—and the whirling multiplicity of the machine age. Yet this was the same man who advocated the "modern basis of culture," according to which one did not stoop to pay filial homage to the past. Modern man should move beyond the forms conveyed to him by mere tradition, dissolving those forms into their constituent elements and then reconstituting them at will, in more rational, life-enhancing ways. In the teeth of his mounting reservations, Mumford continued to believe that such modern means could best achieve ultimate human ends, refusing to abandon his progressive principles for any conservatism that would deny man's potential lordship over the terms of his earthly existence.

The same ambivalence informed Mumford's view of the city—the great passion of his career, the subject upon which all of his diverse interests converged. Mumford advocated something that he called "organic planning," a paradoxical term that neatly illustrates the powerful antinomies his thought struggled to reconcile. All of the great cities of history were, he believed, historical products, accretions of many generations of human strivings and achievements, and therefore tangible expressions of their inhabitants' way of life. The medieval city, as his loving descriptions in *The City in History* (1961) leave no doubt, was a particular favorite of Mumford, once again suggesting a parallel with the anti-modern affinities of the cathedral-struck Adams. A town like Siena served as a perfect example of organic urbanism, which "moves from need to need, from opportunity to opportunity, in a series of adaptations that themselves become increasingly coherent and purposeful, so that they generate a complex, final design, hardly less unified than a preformed geometric pattern." Each medieval town "grew out of a unique situation, presented a unique constellation of forces, and produced, in its plan, a unique solution." Each was like a medieval tapestry, with the great cathedral as its central figure.

Such towns did not grow willy-nilly, Mumford insisted. They grew in accordance with the principles laid down by sound urban planning, even if it was not yet called by that name. What nineteenth-century romantics admired in the medieval town was emphatically *not* the result of "effortless spontaneity and artless unconsciousness," but the result of "effort, struggle, supervision, and control." Hence, the achievement of "organic" cities compatible with the needs of twentieth-century man would require a similar process; and such a plan was "impossible until biological, social, and personal needs have been canvassed, until the cultural and educational purposes of the city have been integrated into a balanced whole." Effective urban planning, then, had to be based upon a complete inventory of human needs and an all-encompassing vision of man's place in the scheme of things. Mumford did not say, however, where a pluralistic democracy would find the philosopher-king able to enumerate all human needs, nor how such a list would crystallize into a substitute for the cathedral.

For Mumford, a humane urban environment would be most likely to flourish in a regional setting, one in which the balance and distinctiveness of urban and rural areas could be maintained, rather than congealing into the sprawling highway-fed megalopolitan mass he so ardently loathed. This concept of the "region" was, in fact, central to his vision of low-density, decentralized garden cities that would replace obsolete metropolises such as New York and Chicago; and Mumford's lifelong involvement with the regional-planning movement shows his enduring dedication to the rethinking of modern urbanism. From the moment Mumford fell under the intellectual spell of the eccentric Scottish botanist-sociologist-town planner Patrick Geddes (after whom he named his only son), he came to see cities as the places in which "the issues of civilization are focused." Hence, planners had to look beyond the purely mechanical and economic function of the city; they had to consider the city as a staging place for human lives, an emotional entity, a complex ecosys-

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tem. They had to look at the city holistically to provide for the needs of the whole man.

Mumford was calling, of course, for a rather sweeping brand of utopian thinking, although he has always strenuously resisted that label, declaring, "Life is better than Utopia." *The Story of Utopias* mocked past utopias and treated the utopian ideal itself with considerable suspicion. Donald Miller, editor of *The Lewis Mumford Reader* (recently published by Pantheon) and author of a forthcoming authorized biography of Mumford, has praised Mumford for his "close attention to human needs and to human scale, his preference for small plans and projects over monumental ones." Yet, despite the many disclaimers and denials that Mumford habitually inserted in his work to preemptively "answer" his critics, one cannot escape the fact that Mumford's work has revolved constantly around the possibilities of a social milieu comprehensively reordered through the power of human intelligence.

Mumford has been, as Edward Shils put it, "a sage and prophet of a New Jerusalem," for his proposals nearly always involved the large-scale reorientation and reconstruction of the economy and cultural geography of entire regions. He was not merely interested in better serving the public, but in making it over into a better social organism, using "the pattern of an ideal community" to "overcome the momentum of actual institutions." Usually "organic" conceptions of society are thought to have conservative implications, since the very concept of the organism implies integrity and homeostasis and cautions against the clumsy intervention of the planner into the "momentum of actual institutions." Mumford, however, suffered no such diminution of his aspirations. Instead, his thought exemplified the premises (if not always the confidence) of the progressive reformer, who continues to believe in the perfectibility of man. For "organic planning" stands in the same relation to cities that eugenics does to organisms.

The depth of Mumford's later distemper may serve as a measure of how deeply his expectations were confounded. World War II seems to have been a watershed event for him, for thereafter the tone of his work shifted decisively to the negative, and his writings came to sound more and more like angry, and often crankish, jeremiads directed at nearly every aspect of the modern world—from jet planes, highways, and space capsules to improperly built toilet seats and "machine-age mattresses" (whose softness is, he asserts sternly, "an obstacle to satisfactory sexual intercourse"). The war itself was one source of Mumford's disappointment. Mumford had been a courageous and tireless advocate of American intervention in World War II, so much so that he twice interrupted his lectures on *The South in Architecture* to expatiate on the subject, and angrily denounced longtime friends who disagreed with his position. But the conduct of the war, particularly the Allied use of strategic bombing, culminating in the development and military use of atomic weapons against civilian targets, seems to have left him convinced that the forces of technology had begun to take on a sinister life of their own.

Worse yet, the very principles of modern architecture for which Mumford had so ardently fought, and which seemed to triumph in the postwar era, led in those years to an urbanism radically different from his hopes. Mumford hated the Nazis partly because of their rejection of modern architecture, but now he found that attempts to render his cherished stripped-down principles, especially as embodied in the designs of German refugee architects, resulted in stark, emotionless environments far worse than those they had replaced. He derided the skyscrapers of Mies van der Rohe as "elegant monuments of nothingness," which "existed alone in the Platonic world of his imagination and had no relation to site, climate, insulation, function, or internal activity." The burst of enthusiasm for urban renewal in the post-war years left Mumford stone cold, since such renewal seemed to him little more than a reign of terror for the bulldozer, ripping down established neighborhoods in order to construct the sterile phantasms of planners enthralled with "yesterday's city of tomorrow."

These unexpected developments led to some curious reversals of opinion for a man of the twenties. Although Mumford still went out of his way to distance himself from the historicism of Henry Hope Reed or the anti-planning prescriptions of Jane Jacobs—for he certainly did not want to be thought a conservative—he sometimes found himself sounding like a traditionalist. For example, in 1924 he

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had condemned the old Pennsylvania Station in New York as "imperial architecture," a decorative façade of "grandiloquent stones" designed to conceal "the servile routine of the factory system." But by 1958, Mumford had changed his mind. Outraged by the piecemeal modernization of the station's interior (which served as a prelude to its demolition), Mumford proclaimed that Charles Follen McKim's original pseudo-Roman plan had "a noble simplicity," an "essential grandeur," a "crystal clarity that gave the circulation the effortless inevitability of a gravity-flow system, with pools of open space to slow down and rest in when one left the main currents." His earlier contempt silently fell by the wayside.

No doubt this change of heart had something to do with the routine of his own life in the intervening years, which required him regularly to commute by train between his home in Dutchess County and the great metropolis he constantly wrote about (but could not bear to live in). Like any enduring public monument, Pennsylvania Station had become invested with the residue of a thousand memories large and small, an anchoring still point within the ebb and flow of an active life. These are considerations that have little to do with organic functionalism, or with advanced principles of design—but everything to do with memory, with connection to the past, with elusive qualities that only time itself, and not the ingenious designer or planner, can confer. Such can be true even of thoroughly unprepossessing public buildings that nevertheless have come to acquire social meaning. It is preeminently true of houses, as Mumford's description of his own house shows vividly:

> We gradually fell in love with our shabby house as a young man might fall in love with a homely girl whose voice and smile were irresistible. As with faces—Abe Lincoln bears witness—character is more ingratiating and enduring than mere good looks. No rise in our income has ever tempted us to look elsewhere for another house, still less to build a more commodious or fashionable one. In no sense was this the house of our dreams. But over our lifetime it has slowly turned into something better, the house of our realities. In all its year-by-year changes, this dear house has enfolded and remodeled our family character—exposing our limitations as well as our virtues.

This lovely passage tells us that the most important element of the built environment is what the beholder builds in his mind, through the intricate web of associations that constitutes its precious personal and social meaning.

Had Mumford carried this insight into other realms, he might have come to different conclusions; in particular, his awareness that architecture is a social art might have led him to pay greater heed to the tastes of the citizenry. In *The Brown Decades*, for example, he complained bitterly, as have most subsequent architectural historians, about the sharp repudiation of "progressive" architectural principles embodied in the Columbian Exposition of 1893, for which Daniel Burnham was commissioned to design an elaborate, pseudo-Roman "White City." The fact remains, however, that the Exposition's social appeal was broad and powerful, for it left an unforgettable impression in the minds of its millions of visitors, from the happy throngs of ordinary middle-class midwesterners who filed up and down its steps, to such sophisticated and articulate intellectuals as William Dean Howells and Henry Adams. Did not these stunning neoclassical structures manifestly fulfill a social need to which a responsible urban designer ought to pay attention?

Such needs did not necessarily have to be fulfilled by traditional means. They might also be fulfilled by the very technological feats that Mumford had come to loathe. For example, Mumford has always had an almost blinding hatred for the automobile, and like many of such a mind, he could not conceive that the construction of interstate highways might in fact be eagerly welcomed by his countrymen and that the automobile might be serving real human needs, as those humans understand their needs. And that a more "rational" system of transportation would undoubtedly mean unprecedented levels of government coercion, orchestrated by phalanxes of planner-bureaucrats—hardly the fulfillment of Mumford's cherished decentralist ideal.

Mumford was no less blind to the human needs fulfilled by the most potent symbol of modern urban architecture, against which he railed endlessly: the skyscraper. Louis Sullivan had composed prose hymns to the tall building, but Mumford saw the skyscraper as little more than a plaything of capitalists and

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real-estate moguls, and he reproached Sullivan—a figure Mumford otherwise admired—for failing to realize this. Sullivan, however, saw more deeply into the matter when he pointed to the tall building's "proud and soaring" qualities, which thrilled and elevated the spirit of the public onlooker—a principal reason why Americans from any major city still reserve a special pride for the tallest buildings in their downtown. Surely a man who thought of the city as an organic expression of a people's way of life could not seriously wish to exclude such marvelous evocations of modern man's soaring ambitions—unless, of course, it was that very way of life he had come to detest.

In the end, that is precisely what happened. The critic of American institutions turned into a damner of unrepentant Nineveh, his work saturated with bitterness and apocalyptic gloom. Mumford began his career seeking new social forms more adequate to the needs of human beings. He ended it calling for new human beings, who were willing to accept a change "of the whole organism and the whole personality" so that they might be worthy of the new modes of social organization he envisioned. As such, he took his place among that long tradition of Enlightened thinkers who would like to force us to be free and who believe that they possess the systemic panacea to accomplish that end.

Unfortunately, with the role change from critic to prophet, Mumford's thought lost much of the concreteness and specificity, born of careful observation, that had formerly enriched it. Preoccupied with nuclear holocaust, environmental catastrophe, and the horrors of "the megamachine," Mumford began to serve up a steady diet of angry platitudes and fantastic pipe dreams. To be sure, one cannot deny the validity of many of Mumford's concerns. But too often there is a maddeningly abstract, all-inclusive, self-indulgent, and therefore unhelpful quality about his critique—as, for example, in the following passage, when he attributes the problem of crime in the parks of New York to

> the increasing pathology of the whole mode of life in the great metropolis, a pathology that is directly proportionate to its overgrowth, its purposeless materialism, its congestion, and its insensate disorder . . . [manifested also] in the enormous sums spent on narcotics, sedatives, stimulants, hypnotics, and tranquilizers to keep the population of our "great" cities from coming to terms with the vacuous desperation of their daily lives and with the even more vacuous horrors that their more lunatic rulers and scientific advisors seem to regard as a reasonable terminus for the human race.

Such rolling avalanches of ire became an all too frequent feature of Mumford's later work; it is as if the prophet, inflated by his own missionary self-regard, succumbed to the Ahab-like hubris he decried. One can easily win standing ovations for such utterances today, but they are a far cry from the disciplined promise of Mumford's own golden day.

Still, one must acknowledge that the ambivalences that render Mumford's thought so confused, and the rationalist premises that he could never shake, were present from the beginning. Beneath the robes of this would-be Jonah still beats the heart of a twenties rebel against sham convention, a nineteenth-century progressive, a *philosophe* convinced that man can be the master of all things and that sheer stupidity has brought us to our present difficulties. Such a vantage point hardly allows the possibility that a more inscrutable, perhaps tragic, destiny may be unfolding, that an inescapable irony permeates all human striving, that this world will not likely be redeemed by the wiles of social planners or any other emanations of the human will. Mumford, of course, is far too sophisticated to be unaware of such possibilities. He had read his Reinhold Niebuhr and has quoted him on occasion. He knows Blake's admonition that good is done only in minute particulars, and he quotes it, too. He has even written a book on Herman Melville, that superlative diagnostician of human frailty and limitation. The problem is that Lewis Mumford, apparently, has never taken any of it to heart.

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Classical Scholarship for a Classical Country

ARNALDO MOMIGLIANO

I

When we talk about Italian classical studies, we are soon brought back to one of the most obvious paradoxes of modern Italian life: the reluctance of the Italians in the last two centuries—from, say, 1750 to 1950—to ask basic questions about their classical past, whether Greek or Latin, while worrying about it continuously.

Let us not forget that southern Italy and Sicily have a direct Greek past, apart from the circumstance that the reintroduction of Greece into the fabric of Western European culture happened in the fifteenth century, mainly in Italy on Italian initiative. The conditions whereby first ancient Greece and then ancient Rome lost centrality in Italy, after having been rediscovered by the Italian humanists, are well known, though there is scope for further research. No doubt the Greek language became less attractive after 1550 because of the Counter-Reformation in the precise form in which it developed in Italy: prevalence of the Vulgate, distrust of the Greek Fathers, a general suspicion of philosophers like the Stoics, the Epicureans, and even the Platonists. It was no good being a follower of Erasmus. Yet this cannot be the whole story. The decline of Greek somehow went together with the new effort to make Tuscan an Italian national language. Greek was more or less left out in the Jesuit schools, which by the seventeenth century had already established themselves as the schools of the upper classes, whereas Latin remained central to the Jesuit *ratio studiorum*. Less Latin was in any case a consequence of the crisis of the Jesuits in the eighteenth century, which led for a while to the dissolution of their order. But Latin, though then competing with French as an international language, remained firmly in the system of eighteenth-century aristocratic and ecclesiastic education. It is remarkable how the ability to write Latin verse and prose was still appreciated in the nineteenth century when it had lost any connection with ordinary life.

What crumbled in the eighteenth century was the image of Roman history as it had been transmitted by Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus and refurbished for modern use by Machiavelli and his disguised followers, the Tacitists. Less obviously, what replaced that image of Roman history was a picture of Italy before Rome or beside Rome. All those Celts, Ligurians, Veneti, Etruscans, Samnites, Oscans, Messapii, and Sicels, who together with the Greeks had had their days of glory before the Romans took over, were brought in to explain modern Italy with its regional traditions and municipal stories. There is no point, of course, in separating at this stage what was wishful thinking from what was hard fact in the new picture of Italy before the Roman rule. It modified the notion of what Italy had been under Roman rule by emphasizing the internal developments of individual cities according to the model provided by Scipione Maffei in his classic book on Roman Verona. Another consequence that gained in importance in the early nineteenth century was the trend to acknowledge and even magnify the part of the

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Germans in shaping Italian history after the end of the Western Roman Empire. Goths, Lombards, Franks (and Byzantines) attracted new attention. Antonio Muratori's gigantic work in collecting the sources for Italian medieval history is both a cause and an effect of this change. Giambattista Vico no doubt has his part in this movement, but not the part one would expect. What appealed to Vico's immediate disciples and followers, even up to the beginning of the nineteenth century with a man like Vincenzo Cuoco, was Vico's juvenile discovery of an archaic Italic wisdom, "antiquissima Italorum sapientia."

Put into hard currency, all of these developments meant acceptance of the realities of eighteenth-century Italy, with its many states, some very small, with the wide direct or indirect Austrian hegemony, and with the still prevailing Spanish traditions of the Kingdom of Naples. But these changes also meant some faith in the cities as seats of local government and residences of intelligent and educated aristocracies. The prestige of the Italian medieval "comuni," so characteristic of public opinion in the nineteenth century, began to be established in the eighteenth century. Another power in Italian life was less directly discussed, though it was indirectly made controversial both as an Italian institution and as the heir of the Roman Empire: the Church of Rome. The Church of Rome was by the eighteenth century a state ruling most of central Italy outside of Tuscany: This state included the oldest university of Europe, Bologna, and the old Longobard duchy of Spoleto. Internationally, this state was more prestigious than the still-surviving Holy Roman Empire. However diminishing the attraction of this Church may have been in the eyes of many upper-class Italians, public debate on the right of the Church of Rome to political power was limited and even within those limits fraught with danger, as the case of Pietro Giannone made evident. The decline of the idea of classical Rome in the eighteenth century can hardly be separated from the decline in the attractions of the Roman Church. Two signs of this are the ascendancy of Jansenism in Northern Italy and the revival of interest in the autonomy of metropolitan sees. The French Revolution found Italians disenchanted with, but not rebellious to, the Church, nostalgically withdrawing into their own old cities, asking for reforms, and occasionally obtaining them, but certainly not on Roman models.

The reputation of the Italian eighteenth century as a "secolo senza Roma" is on the whole well deserved. The new archaeological discoveries that appeared and remained memorable were either on the Greek (or at least non-Roman) soil of Paestum and Agrigentum or on the border between the Roman and the non-Roman, as at Herculaneum in the south and at Velleia in the north. Interestingly enough, the Greek element was valued more where the Roman element was pressing, as in Naples. Domenico Diodati's claim that Jesus spoke Greek as did the ancient Neapolitans (1767) could only come from Naples. The Sicilians never quite abandoned their attitude of being victims of successive invasions from the Sicels to the Punics, from the Greeks to the Romans, from the Byzantines to the Arabs, from the French to the Spanish, not to speak of the Piedmontese parenthesis in the eighteenth century that anticipated Garibaldi. Little was left in Sicily to the natives, except the Cyclops and the ruling local aristocracy, arrogant and greedy, but educated, rich in ideas and building its own museums: we have still in Catania the Museo Biscari. (See my papers in *Settimo Contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico,* Rome 1984, 115–153.)

It was in this atmosphere that the study of history began to become an important part of the syllabus of Italian schools and universities—rather slowly, as I have tried to explain elsewhere. (See my essay "History as an Academic Subject" in J. M. Wallace (ed.), *The Golden and the Brazen World,* Berkeley 1985, 187–204.) Few Italian universities had chairs of history before 1750; and there was even less formal teaching of history in the secondary schools. Throughout the century, upper-class education remained on the whole geared to Latin classics and Latin rhetoric. The gap became wider between the adult interests of educated men and the education that their children received in the schools. No doubt, as I have implied, the wind of change was felt in some universities. In Venice and Padua, Melchiorre Cesarotti compared Ossian with Homer and much later contributed to the Homeric question by discussing it with F. A. Wolf (1801). Most of the original work, as far as I know, was done outside the universities,

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in libraries supported by princes, in academies and in monasteries or other ecclesiastical establishments. Academies, like the Accademia of Cortona, took charge of the new interest in the Etruscans. An ecclesiastical institution at university level, the Seminario of Padua, was the place for the new investigation of the Latin vocabulary that produced Egidio Forcellini's *Lexicon:* we still use it. Journals—in themselves almost a new thing—expressed the new interests in historical and ecclesiastical subjects. Gibbon soon became known in Italy, first in a translation from the French, then in a better one from the English organized in Pisa. The translation provoked Catholic reactions, among them the theological refutation by Nicola Spedalieri (1784). But on the whole Gibbon came to stay because he was the guide towards the Middle Ages.

II

We may speculate about what would have happened *if* Napoleon had not occupied Italy, but it would not take us far. With Napoleon the Roman Empire became a French Empire; the Pope was a prisoner of it; Italy was a vassal kingdom of the Empire. These were not the conditions to make the Roman Empire very popular in Italy. Though the Napoleonic rule of Italy has been much and well studied, I do not know of sufficient global research on the transformation of the universities and on the transfer of classical scholars from Italy to Paris during the Napoleonic regime: the best-known case is that of the archaeologist Ennio Quirino Visconti, who from Paris recognized the significance of the Elgin Marbles. The classicism that prospered under and after Napoleon was turned toward Greece rather than toward Rome, as the importance of Homer for Cesarotti, Monti, Foscolo, and Pindemonte is enough to show. Also Giacomo Leopardi cared more for Greek than for Latin and preferred Late Antiquity to the prosperous Roman Empire. Some historians insisted, and went on insisting after Napoleon, on pre-Roman Italy, following the example of G. Micali. But the great event was the consecration, still under Napoleon's rule, of the image of the free medieval "comuni" by the Geneva historian Simonde de Sismondi, who claimed Italian origins and found his audience in Italy.

The rapid collapse of the Napoleonic Empire brought out sympathies with the English and above all with the German Romantics. They were partly mediated by French writers like Mme de Staël, but such men as the Milanese Giovanni Berchet had independent access to German thought and were not ready to accept Mme de Staël's interpretation. She insisted, quite rightly, that German Romanticism was based on the writings of the historian Winckelmann and was a partial return to Greek pagan ideas. Berchet derived from the German Romantic movement the different conclusion that it was time to leave the ancients alone and to concentrate on the Middle Ages and on folk poetry. The prestige of German scholarship in Italy, especially in the period 1820–1850, was based, not on what German scholars could have taught about the Greeks and Romans, but on what they actually taught about medieval Italy. The aging historian and patriot Cesare Balbo started again to study German about 1830 ("fatica terribile a mia età," as he wrote to his friend Carlo Troya) to find out what the Germans were doing about the Italian Middle Ages. The most widely appreciated element of medieval history was the conflict between the Italian "comuni" and the German Emperors, of which the battle of Legnano was the chief episode or rather the symbol. Berchet himself composed the poem on it that we as children had to learn by heart. Matters were more ambiguous about the medieval popes. The new "guelfi," the sympathizers with the medieval papacy, and the new "ghibellini," who rather pathetically were the anticlericals and even annexed Padre Dante to their company, would always turn to episodes of medieval history for their own ends.

Yet the medieval component of the Risorgimento ethos, however important, indeed prominent, could never eliminate ancient Rome. Italy had been unified by Napoleon, as Italy had been unified by the Romans. Rome was more than a claim to ancient greatness: it was a promise of unity. Municipalism declined, the battle of Legnano notwithstanding. The alternatives of federalism (Cattaneo) and of democratic unity (Mazzini) developed. After the fall of Daniele Manin's Venice and of Giuseppe Mazzini's Rome in 1849, there could be no further illusion about the participation of the papacy in the reform and unifi-

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cation movement. The Rome of the popes had to be replaced in Mazzini's ideal by the Rome of the people—not classical, but also not imperial. In Mazzini's ideal the "giovine Italia" had to go together with the "giovine Europa," a utopian democratic society in which even the Poles would be pulled out of Russia. Ultimately the occupation of Rome was considered inevitable by the reluctant Benso di Cavour and became the primary aim of Piedmontese expansion. In a period of wars we shall perhaps not be surprised that Roman victories became attractive in themselves. But, all in all, the idea of Rome was not an imperial notion in the age of the Risorgimento: it was the condition for the unification of Italy and for the elimination of the temporal power of the popes. The scholarly books that were more or less successfully produced during, or immediately after, the Risorgimento—such as those by Enrico Bindi, Atto Vannucci, and Ruggiero Bonghi—dealt with republican rather than with imperial Rome and contributed little to the knowledge of either one. There was of course first-class antiquarian work on Rome: it is enough to mention the name of Bartolommeo Borghesi, whom Mommsen considered his teacher. But it is difficult to find a bridge between this erudition and the work of contemporary historians who were trying to make sense of Rome. Even after the consolidation of unified Italy, archaic and republican Rome remained for a long time the center of Italian historians of Rome, as the works by E. Pais and G. De Sanctis show. The first Italian historian to turn decisively toward the Roman imperial age was Guglielmo Ferrero at the beginning of this century. He was applauded in France and in America, but ostracized in Italy.

This lack of interest in the Roman Empire immediately separated Italy from France and England, though at least French historical studies of that period were far better known in Italy than the German ones. Histories of the Roman Empire, such as those of Victor Duruy and Charles Merivale, never became influential in Italy. Indeed one of the reasons why the Italians were so full of admiration for German historical scholarship was that they shared with it a basic indifference to Roman imperial history. Niebuhr and Mommsen impressed the Italians as historians of monarchic and republican Rome. Mommsen was later concerned with imperial Rome, but it is characteristic of him that he never published his promised volume on the Roman emperors.

An additional factor helped to increase the indifference of the Italians to Roman imperial history, and this was a factor the Germans could not share. Roman law was not a problem in Italy, as it was in Germany. The very question of the advantages and disadvantages of codification that Karl van Savigny had raised and combined with his own views about the function of Roman law in Germany could not be seen from the same angle in Italy. Codification of law was, of course, also a problem in Italy. But when one examines in detail what lawyers thought of Savigny in the three or four Italian regions in which Savigny's authority was higher—Naples, Tuscany, Piedmont, and the Veneto—one has the definite impression that the Italians were less guided by Savigny as a student of Roman law in ancient Rome than by Savigny as a student of Roman law in the Middle Ages. What most of his Italian admirers were really asking Savigny to help with was the understanding of the Italian Middle Ages.

The history of the Roman Empire, including Roman law, was not the only subject about which the men of the Risorgimento cared little. Greek history was another, even in relation to southern Italy and Sicily. One of the masterpieces of Italian historiography during the Risorgimento was the *History of Arab Rule in Sicily* by M. Amari. There is nothing comparable for Greek Sicily or for Magna Graecia.

After 1870 the scientific study of Greek history was introduced into Italy by two Germans, Adolf Holm and Julius Beloch. The latter made his chair at Rome University a spectacular center for research both on Greek and on Roman history. Anyone who knew Julius Beloch was impressed by his extravagant way of being German, if one considers that he had spent his life since adolescence in Italy. But Beloch's Germanism was polemical not so much against the Italians as against the Germans—who regarded him as a Jew (though he was at best of remote Jewish origin) and who hardly welcomed him at the German Institute of Rome and made him totally unwelcome in Germany when he taught at Leipzig in 1913. During the First World War, while in Italy, Beloch brought

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trouble upon himself by provocative behavior. Out of this pathetic situation between two cultures came the resolute independence of Beloch in front of Mommsen and his originality in thinking about both Greek and Roman history. What Beloch passed on to his pupils was this habit of fearless, rigorous, and original research. Only after 1890 is Greek history handled with such originality—and increasing originality—by Italians. The greatest historian of Greece (and republican Rome) was to be Beloch's pupil Gaetano de Sanctis. Soon after, young scholars of a Marxist or semi-Marxist formation—Ettore Ciccotti and Corrado Barbagallo—were to raise unorthodox voices in the field of Greek social history. Like Guglielmo Ferrero, these voices never gained complete acceptance in Italy.

Greek and Latin linguistic and literary studies were even more strictly under German influence. It may even have been due to German influence that the teaching of Greek became part of the new Italian elite secondary school, the Ginnasio-Liceo. It was the policy of the Italian government, especially from 1865 onward, to send promising young scholars to Germany. This had been preceded by informal and formal contacts between German and Italian individuals and institutions. For instance, in 1851 two ex-members of the Subalpine Parliament of Turin, Luigi Parola and Vincenzo Botta, visited institutes of education in Germany and published their report on them. In Rome, the Instituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica, founded in 1829 and increasingly under German control—so much so that it later became the Roman section of the German Archaeological Institute—was a place of constant communication between German and Italian scholars. The reputation of an Italian classical scholar in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century depended to a great extent on his reputation of having had German teachers, or at least of being approved by the Germans. German books were translated into Italian for ordinary teaching. Commentaries on classical texts depended on German models; and the first important journal of classical studies, the *Rivista di Filologia e Istruzione Classica*, which was started in 1872, was clearly German-oriented. Its publisher in Turin, Ermanno Loescher, was of German origin (connected with the Teubner family), and the real managing editor of the *Rivista di Filologia* was for many years a classical scholar from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Giuseppe Müller, a professor in the University of Turin who had studied in Vienna.

There is no question that this German protectorate weighed heavily on Italian classical studies at any level and created embarrassment. The transition from the old Jesuit methods to the new German methods of teaching, even by grammars and dictionaries translated from the German, did not look quite right in every quarter. The professor of Latin in Bologna, Giovan Battista Gandino, was the model of a conservative Ciceronian stylist. There were discussions about method among teachers, and occasionally the dissatisfaction was vigorously expressed by respected scholars with something new of their own to say, such as Giuseppe Fraccaroli, a professor of Greek literature in the University of Turin at the beginning of this century. But there was no explosion of hostility until the First World War, when new obvious factors intervened. We shall have a better understanding of the atmosphere of Italian classical studies between, say, 1860 and 1910 if we turn our attention to some other, perhaps more decisive, aspects of these studies.

III

It is already implicit in what I have written that German Romanticism as such played only a small part in Italian classical studies. One could not say the same for other disciplines, such as medieval history, philosophy, Italian literature, and Indo-European philology (one has only to think of G. I. Ascoli). Greek religion and Greek art remained secondary interests for the Italians of the nineteenth century. There was little ambition among Italian classical scholars to recapture the Greek, or even the Roman, gods. Greek or Roman paganism may have appealed to the poet Giosue Carducci, especially in his middle phase. But classical scholars—even if they had been pupils of Carducci in Bologna, like Giovanni Pascoli—kept their distance over that. All the German discussions about mythology, culminating in Frederick Creuzer, Heinrich Voss, and K. O. Müller, did not affect the Italians seriously. K. O. Müller was much admired (and translated) for his *History of the Litera-*

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ture of Ancient Greece, a work for export, originally written for the English public, which least revealed his most personal preoccupations.

When one talks of effective German influences in Italian classical scholarship, one is really referring to the post-Romantic age, to the post-1850 system of teaching and research that came to prevail in German universities. I am aware that any generalization about German universities between 1850 and 1880 is bound to provoke reservations and counter-examples; but it is perhaps fair to say that a large dose of materialism penetrated into the teaching. This teaching emphasized physiology, the chemical factors of civilization, and number as power. Jacob Moleschott, a Dutchman who, via Germany, became a professor of physiology in the University of Turin in 1861 and in the University of Rome in 1879, and J. Beloch, a typical adorer of number as power, are among the direct importers of German materialism into Italy. Where one cannot talk of materialism in Italian classical scholarship, there is, however, an emphasis on the collection of evidence, on discovery of manuscripts, on rather mechanical critical editions, and on "Beiträge."

However, even from the Italian side the realities of classical studies did not conform to the pattern that was imposed on them. The central figure in the classical philology of Italy in the nineteenth century is, without any doubt and hesitation, Domenico Comparetti. He was a Roman pharmacist, born in 1835, who took up classics for personal satisfaction and was barely twenty-five years old when he became a professor of Greek in the University of Pisa. He knew of German scholarship through his contacts in Rome, but from a distance. Comparetti gave the first reasonable interpretation of the myth of Oedipus and was never too impressed by Max Müller, who was winning followers in Italy. Comparetti's association with students of Italian literature, such as his Pisa colleague Alessandro d'Ancona, made him particularly aware of problems of popular literature in the Romance languages, and Comparetti himself contributed valiantly to the publication of early Italian texts. Comparetti turned his experience of later ages and literatures to the understanding of the classical tradition. His *Virgilio nel Medio Evo* of 1872 showed the vagaries of a classical legacy when no longer controlled by formal schooling, but it was also directed at explaining Dante in relation to Virgil. Later, Comparetti mastered Finnish and the questions about its national epic, the *Kalevala*, because he thought this work could provide a clue to the composition of the Homeric poems. Comparetti remained a basic authority on the *Kalevala* for a long time. He was also the virtual organizer of the Italian exploration of Crete and published its most important find, the Gortyna Law Code. It was the most sensational discovery in Greek law of the nineteenth century. Comparetti was in addition a pioneer in the study of Orphic and Epicurean texts from Magna Graecia; he published neo-Greek texts from Italy and managed to produce a perfectly respectable edition of Procŏpius's Gothic Wars. One could go on.

What moved Comparetti was a resolutely rationalistic interpretation of Romantic problems. He was in sympathy with popular poetry and prose, but as an aristocrat: no weakness. He was never the head of a formal school, and when he passed from Pisa to Florence, his relation to his former pupil and colleague Gerolamo Vitelli became increasingly cool. Comparetti left his mark on whatever he touched. He left above all his mark on us. Italian scholarship would not have its independence, its depth, and its originality without this man who never wanted to return to his native Rome, but died in Florence in 1927 at the age of ninety-two, a senator of the Italian kingdom. Rather incongruously Comparetti and Beloch were our grandfathers.

The hard commitment to an interpretation of the whole Greek world from Homer to the Byzantines, and of the whole Roman world from its Italic roots to its Romance transformation, is Comparetti's bequest. The classical scholar who, though German-educated, proved to be nearest to Comparetti was his successor in Florence, Giorgio Pasquali, who was more exact and less profound but certainly, like Comparetti, capable of going up and down the Greek, the Roman, the Byzantine, and the Italian world without losing himself.

Unlike Comparetti, Gerolamo Vitelli had the reputation of being an orthodox representative of German methods. Part of his quarrel

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with Giuseppe Fraccaroli, whose *L'irrazionale nella letteratura* (1903) was meant to be a manifesto of intellectual independence, was caused by this reputation. But I suspect that the secret preoccupation of the Vitelli that we younger classicists came to know, admittedly rather late, was to find a place of its own outside these controversies. Papyrology gave him the chance. It was a new science, more English than German, though Vitelli never committed the mistake of underrating the German contribution to it. Vitelli was of course well qualified for papyrological editing by his exceptional knowledge of Greek. He had probably a greater knowledge of Greek poetry than any specialized editor of papyri before the Oxonian Edgar Lobel. If Vitelli concentrated on papyri for his published work, as a teacher he was more concerned with encouraging pupils and friends to take an interest in out-of-the-way late pagan and Christian authors, not to speak of humanists. Vitelli had himself been an editor of Giordano Bruno's Latin writings. One of Vitelli's pupils, Nicola Terzaghi, edited Synesius, and later another pupil, Nicola Festa, edited Petrarch's *Africa* and became the champion of a rather nationalistic and Catholic humanism.

At least another man must be mentioned, Giovanni Pascoli, who was a professor of classical languages before succeeding Carducci in the chair of Italian literature at Bologna. Pascoli was of course chiefly a poet, but a poet who wrote with equal ease and success in Italian and Latin, and in Latin he touched upon delicate subjects of Christian inspiration. He was a multiple winner of the Amsterdam Latin poetry competition; the story goes that he was able to buy a country house from these prizes. The position of Pascoli in Italian classicism is even more difficult to define than his position in Italian poetry, where he stands between his teacher Carducci and his rival D'Annunzio. What Pascoli did, in any case, was to produce a new variety of Italian classicism in which the traditional mastery of classical languages and a more modern feeling for interpretation combined to create poetry that appealed to the Italian educated classes. Carducci's poetry was admired by such German classical scholars as Mommsen and Wilamowitz, who translated Carducci into German. Pascoli basically remained, as a scholar and as a poet, Italian property. He is an important figure in the picture of an Italian classicism as it tried to emerge in its own right from the German protectorate.

I shall add three other less personal elements to this picture of classical scholarship in Italy. One element was the singular attraction of Epicurus and Epicureanism for the Italian mind of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Epicureanism has in a general sense a whole career of its own in modern European thought. But, in the particular atmosphere of the nineteenth-century Italian concern with the Catholic faith, Epicurus seems to have had something special to say. He was a favorite philosopher for Comparetti, who studied him thoroughly, and with Gaetano Trezza, whose breadth and depth of literary and philosophic knowledge stood out in Italian academic life (Trezza, by the way, was an ex-priest). Later Carlo Giussani wrote the best introduction and one of the best commentaries on Lucretius. Epicurus was still the most congenial philosopher for another creative scholar, Ettore Bignone, after the First World War.

The second peculiarity I should like to stress is the unconventional archaeology that developed in Italy in the second part of the nineteenth century. The method with which Giuseppe Fiorelli studied Pompeii or Giacomo Boni the Roman Forum may be liked or disliked, but it brought the past near to the visitors and had scientific consequences. Boni after all discovered the *lapis niger* of the Forum, an inscription that is still giving us something to think about in regard to the Roman monarchy. With more rigor and perhaps less imagination, Pietro Orsi, whose birth in the Austrian Trentino marked him as a man from another world, revolutionized the archaeological history of Sicily and compelled the Sicilians to think about their prehistoric past in new terms. Other archaeologists did the same for other regions: Luigi Pigorini for the Terramare in the north and Antonio Taramelli for pre-Roman Sardinia. Italian archaeology began at this point to have a style of its own.

I shall add, as a third characteristic element of Italian classicism, the new concern with the survival of classical elements in modern popular traditions. This element of Italian classicism was mainly the creation of a Sicilian

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medical doctor who still knew his classics—Giuseppe Pitré. In 1871 Pitré, who was in touch with Max Müller and soon became acquainted with Hermann Usener, founded the *Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari Siciliane,* to which *Archivio* was later added (1882). Pitré went well beyond collecting Sicilian popular traditions; he opened his series to general discussions of ethnographic methods. As the names of Max Müller and Hermann Usener sufficiently indicate, Pitré made no claim to be original, but in fact he was the first to open, or rather re-open in a more modern way, the question of pagan elements in Italian popular life. Ethnographic research became a component, hardly to be underrated, of Italian classicism; it may have contributed to the spreading of modernist tendencies among the intelligentsia of Italian Catholicism.

IV

In the twentieth century other factors contributed to give a new stimulus to Italian classical studies. Unlike the previous ones, these factors were mainly outside the classical field itself. There was a general reorientation of Italian historical, literary, and philosophic thought, of which Benedetto Croce, and next to him Giovanni Gentile, were the main inspiration. Croce's aesthetic theories influenced the analysis of the classics and incidentally guided a great deal of research on ancient literary theories, as the books by Augusto Rostagni show. There was a risk that traditional methods of text criticism and literary analysis (for instance, distinction of literary genres) might fall into discredit; voices of concern were raised (for instance, by Giorgio Pasquali). Teaching in the schools was modified, especially with the Gentile Reform of 1923. Gentile had always had a keen interest in ancient and Renaissance philosophy. His peculiar combination of ancient, Renaissance, and modern history of philosophy left its mark for a long time. It is worth remembering also that P. O. Kristeller was in Italy under Gentile's auspices when he was working on Marsilio Ficino. But Croce and Gentile were far from monopolizing the field. History of science and especially history of mathematics became fashionable and found able specialists in Gino Loria, Federico Enriquez, Giovanni Vailati, and others. Motley groups—one of the most important of which was certainly that of the journal *La Voce* (published from 1908 to 1916)—acquainted Italian schoolteachers and professors with a variety of foreign movements from American pragmatists to English Platonists and French spiritualists. Freud made one of his earliest Italian appearances in print in *La Voce.*

The Catholic modernists, who had their representatives in *La Voce,* affected the classics more intimately. They were making the Bible, Christian origins, patristic literature, and the remote past of the popes into inescapable subjects. They also had direct connections with France and England, which were at variance with the German bias of the culture of Croce and Gentile. The personal story of the most gifted pupil of Gentile, Adolfo Omodeo, is symptomatic. Like his teacher, Omodeo had started by condemning modernism, not because he liked the Church of Rome, but because he thought that modernism was a compromise not worth having between the old religion and modern philosophy. Omodeo wrote hard things against the modernist Ernesto Buonaiuti. At that stage (roughly 1910–1925), Omodeo thought he could absorb the history of early Christianity from Jesus to St. Paul into the history of ancient philosophy. But, when he thought a bit more about that, he realized the history of religion was not exactly history of philosophy and, above all, that his position in the matter of modernism was far nearer to that of Alfred Loisy than to that of his teacher Giovanni Gentile.

Fascism was in any event to separate Omodeo from Gentile for good. The liberal tradition of France, which had produced a Loisy, now appealed to Omodeo from its origins in the July Revolution and even before. For Omodeo himself it was rather a matter of leaving old Christianity for modern religious thought. Omodeo wrote on Loisy and on French liberalism. For other people of Omodeo's generation, such as Luigi Salvatorelli, Raffaele Pettazzoni, and Vittorio Macchioro, modernism was the first direct or indirect occasion for revising one's own ideas about Greek-Roman paganism and early Christianity. The new interest in ancient religions that came to affect classical scholars, especially after the Second World War, and that gave a

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new dignity to Italian studies of history of religion in general, had its origin in Catholic modernism.

Because Italian culture had become so variegated in the period between 1910 and 1930, it is no contradiction to add that there was also a new interest in German Romanticism, especially in its most mystical aspects. How this happened is less clear. The individual personality of Arturo Farinelli, professor of German literature in Turin and a great patron of studies in German Romanticism, clearly counts for something in this process. But of course there was much more. The Italian "idealist" philosophers had after all related their own origins to Fichte and Hegel. Literary criticism found new affinities with the brothers Schlegel. Linguistic studies became more acutely aware of their debt to Franz Bopp and the brothers Grimm and Humboldt. The right or perhaps the left wing of Italian idealists turned to Johann Hamann, Novalis, and Schelling.

A young Italian classical scholar who died in 1917, Antonio Bernardini, left a manuscript, published much later (1947), of a history of classical scholarship that centered on the German Romantics. (A. Bernardini—G. Righi, *Il Concetto di filologia e di cultura classica nel pensiero moderno,* Bari 1947.) This interest in Romanticism can hardly be separated from the interest that classical scholars came to take in Nietzsche. One of the examples I remember is the book on Parmenides by the young Mario Untersteiner (1925), later one of the rigorous interpreters of archaic Greek thought. An article on Nietzsche and Greek tragedy by Tito Tosi goes back to 1904 (in *Atene e Roma*). The First World War no doubt produced a wild outburst of anti-German thought, of which Giuseppe Fraccaroli, and even more so Ettore Romagnoli, became the representatives. But *Minerva e lo Scimmione* by Romagnoli—chiefly an attack on Wilamowitz—was soon refuted by Fausto Nicolini, Croce's friend, and more precisely by Giorgio Pasquali, both in 1920. Another refutation by Gerolamo Vitelli was written in 1917 but saw the light of day only in 1962. (F. Nicolini, *Divagazioni omeriche,* Firenze 1920; G. Pasquali, *Filologia e storia,* Firenze 1920; G. Vitelli, *Filologia classica e. . . romantica,* Firenze 1962.)

The anti-German fashion disappeared with the war: it was regarded as hysteria. When Werner Jaeger weighed in with his Third Humanism between 1923 and 1935, he was understood and appreciated in Italy without any reference to the polemics of the First World War. If this humanism did not gain many followers, one of the reasons was that by that time the Italians were well enough acquainted with German Romanticism to be aware that what Jaeger was trying to do was to refurbish German Romantic ideas by connecting them with Catholic scholasticism—a sort of combination of Friedrich Hölderlin and St. Thomas. Guido Calogero disposed of Jaeger's attempt in a memorable review in *Giornale Critico della Filosofia Italiana* (1934) and even more by his own research on the pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle. While Jaeger himself saved his soul and perhaps his body by emigrating to America, the pupils who remained in Germany discredited themselves by getting closer to Nazism—and that was an additional reason for the poor reception of Jaeger's *Paideia* in Italy. Calogero and Rodolfo Mondolfo—a critical Marxist—guided the research on ancient philosophy in Italy.

I have not yet touched upon the Fascist factor. The Fascists intrinsically owed nothing to ancient Rome. But as I have already pointed out, Rome is never a word you can ignore in Italy. Rome was the best word to convey the notion of aggression and imperialism. The Fascists were aggressive and soon realized the not very profound truth that aggression is the best way of keeping social conflicts down. Besides, the march on Rome could be usefully compared with Sulla's march on Rome—and *similia.* In 1926 Mussolini chose ancient Rome on the sea ("Roma antica sul mare") as a subject for a lecture. It was received less well than he expected. Then, in 1929, the Concordat with the Church provided an opportunity for associating the Duce's Rome with the Pope's Rome. And then, of course, in 1936 we had the Impero, or at least Via dell'Impero in Rome. Positive and negative consequences of this progressive identification of Fascism with Rome—which went bankrupt soon afterward with the subservience to anti-Roman Nazism—still await research. Two facts are beyond question. The most important discussion on ancient history that developed in Italy in the thirties was about Greek liberty. Though inspired by Benedetto Croce, it remained almost entirely

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a discussion internal to the school of Gaetano De Sanctis, involving De Sanctis himself, Aldo Ferrabino, Piero Treves, and myself. Its meaning was inescapable. The *History of the Greeks* by De Sanctis (1939) came out of it. The other fact is that the discussion on the Roman Empire in relation to the Church got into new, not exactly orthodox, depths. Here I must claim some special credit. (See "Platone, la storia e gli storici secondo P. Vidal-Naquet," *Riv. Storica Ital.*, 95, 1983, pp. 447–450; and see also my volume *Sui fondamenti della storia antica*, Torino 1984, especially pp. 89–184.)

The most serious damage done to scholarship by Fascism was not at the upper level of research. It was at the level of ordinary teaching, ordinary conversation, ordinary behavior, and ordinary common sense. Italian classical scholars had to clear up the mess after the Second World War, had to make up their minds again about State and Church, and had to cope with a tremendous amount of Marxism in theory and historical research that came from everywhere, Russia (though not prominently) included. To turn to French structuralism or to that peculiar synthesis of structuralism and Marxism characteristic of Vernant's school was natural enough in the circumstances: it has happened not only in Italy. But the scholars who count most in Italy today (some, among them S. Mazzarino, E. Gabba, S. Timpanaro, A. La Penna, and L. Ruggini Cracco, with an international reputation) are not dependent on foreign models. For them the classics are a central term of reference in judging modern life and operating in it. Thanks to them the classics are now a living tradition in Italy, more than they were in the last two centuries.

Arnaldo Momigliano

1908 –1987

Member, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR *Editorial Board, 1979–1987*

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Readings

Neal Bowers

More heart attacks occur on Monday than
on any other day of the week.
—from an AP wire story

Monday, and the lights are on at 6 A.M.
all over town, everyone ready early
for the heart attack, the big seizure.
Sunday the left arm hummed a flat alto,
twitched like a delicate needle pointing red,
and now it starts early to thrum,
picking up remote tremors, small shiftings
before the major shock,
before the room lists
and the cup of coffee slides away.

That roaring in the ears could be the furnace
if it were winter, or the wind;
but it's so still the elm outside
the kitchen window seems cast
from one great pouring of steel.
Nothing moves, except a weight
upon the chest, a climbing, stacking
heaviness before the whole world tips
and the mountains, black against an early sky,
fan out erratic peaks and edges
like a dark graph of something terrible.

NEAL BOWERS, professor of English at Iowa State University, is the author of *James Dickey: The Poet as Pitchman*. His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Harper's Magazine*, and *Sewanee Review*.

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Founding Father

HUGH LLOYD-JONES

THE HISTORY OF HERODOTUS. *Translated by David Grene. University of Chicago Press. $30.*

For all practical purposes, historical writing in the West starts with Herodotus; there is no denying his importance. Had he not written, we should be painfully ignorant of the history of the Mediterranean and the Middle East up to his time. Also, Herodotus is a marvelously entertaining writer who, thanks to the astonishing variety of his subject matter and to his wit, humor, and narrative skill, can be read continuously or dipped into with delight even by those whose ignorance of Greek prevents them from appreciating his writing to the fullest. He is the father not only of history but of ethnology, even of anthropology. There is no denying either his importance or his readability. But is the father of history truly a great historian?

Since his own century, a strong body of opinion has accused Herodotus of credulity, of indifference to truth, even of downright falsification. Thucydides, who was only a generation younger, must have had Herodotus in mind when he wrote that his own history's lack of a mythical element might displease some readers, but that it was not intended simply to win immediate success, and also when he remarked that most people take little trouble to find out the truth. That view of Herodotus has its upholders to this day, as I shall show presently. But there is an even graver charge against him. It has been alleged, and by no mean authorities, that his ethical and religious beliefs precluded him from making a correct assessment of historical motives and connections. Wilamowitz found that Herodotus "had neither political understanding, historical sense, nor a firm and clear world outlook, but wavered between rationalism and superstition." Felix Jacoby thought Herodotus to be "hopelessly handicapped by the religious outlook which he had inherited." David Grene, however, would, I think, agree with me that the religious outlook inherited by Herodotus was one singularly well qualified to help him to survey world history from a detached and enlightened point of view.

Herodotus was born during the eighties of the fifth century B.C. in Halicarnassus, a Greek city of Asia Minor then under Persian rule. After his extensive travels, he made his way to Athens. His historical subject was the invasion of Greece in 480 B.C. by the king of Persia, Xerxes, with a vast naval and military armament, and Xerxes' defeat by a temporary coalition of most of the Greek communities, with Athens and Sparta playing the chief parts. Few historical events have been more surprising or have had more momentous consequences. In order to give an adequate explanation, Herodotus thought it necessary not only to recount much Greek and other Mediterranean and Oriental history of the preceding time, but also to offer much ethnographic and geographic information, mostly about the countries of the Persian Empire, which at that time stretched from Egypt as far west as Bactria and from the latitude of the Black Sea

HUGH LLOYD-JONES, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, is the author of *The Justice of Zeus* and *Blood for the Ghosts. He is the translator of Aeschylus and Semonides.*

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as far south as that of the Persian Gulf. Egypt in particular was given extended treatment, dependent, Herodotus claims, on autopsy, and occupying the whole of the second of the nine books into which the history is divided. Similar treatment was given the remote region of Scythia (South Russia), to which most of the fourth book is devoted. This kind of material occupies most of the first six books, and the actual narrative of the war is contained in the remaining three.

The difficulty of acquiring the information necessary for such a work, and of seeing that it is reasonably accurate, can hardly be exaggerated. A few minor historical works that may or may not be earlier than Herodotus may have helped a little, but the only major work that can have been of much use was that of Hecataeus of Miletus, who was a geographer and a genealogist rather than a historian. The information had to be collected laboriously from diverse informants and in the course of extensive travels. Since Herodotus does not claim to speak any foreign language, he must have depended on the services of many interpreters. Undoubtedly he took great trouble to collect his material and where possible to verify his facts; but he operated with such remote and varied communities and at a time when the borderline between myth and history was so indeterminate that from the beginning his veracity could be doubted, all the more easily because his power as a storyteller is so compelling.

Herodotus warns his readers that he puts down what he has been told, often giving more than one version of a story and often telling us from what source it comes; that is not necessarily a less scientific procedure than that of Thucydides, who gives only one version of each story and does not name his source. Many of his stories are clearly myths, but that does not mean that he takes them literally or that they lack interest or significance.

For example, Herodotus tells a story of the early years of Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, which has many of the standard features of the myth of the birth of the hero as it is described by Otto Rank. The story is certainly not true, but as the foundation myth of the great empire, it is of great interest. Again, Herodotus alleges that after the defeat of the mysterious successor of the Persian king Cambyses, the three Persian nobles who had played the chief parts in that defeat held a debate, in which one suggested that they should establish a democracy, another pleaded for an oligarchy, and the third, Darius, argued successfully for the continuance of monarchy. Such a debate cannot have taken place; but as a specimen of the Greek political theorizing of the time, the story is not uninteresting. The intelligent reader will know how to interpret mythical narrations of this kind. But anyone who takes Herodotus's apparent naïveté for real is being naive himself and has failed to reckon with the historian's wit, humor, and irony.

Certainly Herodotus tells his story in a framework provided by religion; but Greek religion is totally unlike dogmatic monotheism. Its gods do not arbitrarily change the course of nature, but work through natural processes and human passions. Thus Herodotus can remark that it makes sense to say that the passage through which the great river of Thessaly, the Peneus, flows between the mountains to the sea was made by the god Poseidon, because anyone who thinks Poseidon causes earthquakes will believe this, and it was clearly an earthquake that made the passage. In this religion the chief god, Zeus, punishes men's crimes against each other; but the punishment is often long delayed, falling not on the criminal but on his descendants, so that the working of divine justice is not easily perceived by short-lived mortals. Thus the usurpation of Gyges, the founder of the Mermnad dynasty of Lydian kings, is punished only in the fifth generation, when Croesus is conquered by the Persians under Cyrus. Herodotus often speaks of envy felt against mortals by the gods. From the human point of view, it is natural for a believer in Greek religion to think of the gods as envying or resenting excessive prosperity on the part of mortals; yet a god might retort, as gods do in Homer, that the so-called envy is merely the gods' wish to defend their own due honor and the prerogatives that it entails.

Human beings, Herodotus in accordance with his religion thought, cannot attain or keep prosperity without hard work. A family or a nation rises to power, but then grows weak and self-indulgent and must pay the

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penalty. This may be seen as the operation of divine justice or of divine envy, but in any case it is a process so natural as to be inevitable. The Ionian Greeks revolted against the Persians, but refused to endure the strict discipline that the naval commander Dionysius tried to impose on them, and so were defeated and reduced to servitude. The mainland Greeks, on the other hand, could defeat the Persians because the Spartans had long lived a hard life and practiced for war and because Themistocles had persuaded the Athenians to use their find of silver at Laurium not for a general handout but for the building of a battle fleet. The Persians, hardy mountaineers, overcame the Medes and then the Lydians, lords of the rich provinces of Asia Minor; later the Persians in turn grew weak from pride and luxury and were defeated, against all expectations, by the Greeks. At the very end of the history, Herodotus tells how after the conquest of Lydia certain Persians proposed to Cyrus that they should now abandon the mountains of Iran and live in the rich and comfortable countries they had conquered. Those scholars who have supposed that because the history ends with what seems to them a trivial story it must have remained unfinished understand little of Herodotus's methods.

Dogmatic monotheism assumes that there is only one right answer to every moral question. But for the Greek religion there can be more than one answer, and from the clash between conflicting imperatives, tragedy results. The predecessor who influenced Herodotus most was, beyond all comparison, Homer. Just as Homer takes a tragic view of the siege of Troy, Herodotus takes a tragic view of the history he records. He can observe the bad as well as the good qualities of great men and the bad as well as the good consequences of great events; he can treat men and nations, even those with whom he feels a special sympathy, with sovereign impartiality. He is able to describe the diverse customs and institutions of many different human communities without patronizing them from the standpoint of his own culture. The contempt that Greeks came to feel for "barbarians" after the defeat of Xerxes formed no part of Herodotus's way of thinking.

While the academic rationalism of the late nineteenth century was at its height, Herodotus was often severely handled by scholars, as my earlier quotations from Wilamowitz and Jacoby will serve to indicate. But from about 1930 a reaction set in. First, Orientalists found new evidence that confirmed many of Herodotus's statements, and later, certain historians—notably, Arnaldo Momigliano—vindicated Herodotus's historical methods. During the last few years, indeed, his veracity has again been challenged, by Detlev Fehling in Germany and O. K. Armayor in this country. These critics have indeed cast doubt on the truth of a number of Herodotus's allegations, but they are far from having established the general unreliability even of his account of Egypt, from which most of their examples have been taken. But even if some of his claims, such as his belief in the flying snakes of Arabia, cannot easily be accepted, his essential veracity as a historian must surely be acknowledged, as it has by the late eminent historian Hermann Strasburger.

Anyone who can understand his religion must recognize Herodotus as a great historian. The power of his tragic vision of history is enhanced by his possession of literary gifts of the very highest order. His prose is clear, rapid, euphonious, marvelously varied according to variations of his subject matter; he can write in a plain and simple manner, with short sentences loosely strung together, but he can also build up elaborate periodic structures, making effective use of many poetical words. As a stylist, no other writer of classical Greek prose except Plato and, in certain of his works, Demosthenes, can be compared with him.

There is certainly room for a new English translation of Herodotus, but though his Greek is seldom difficult to understand, the task is not an easy one. He is the only major author of the great period of Ionic prose to have come down in his entirety. The dialectal difference between Herodotus and Attic writers—together with his early date, the nature of his subject matter, and the poetical element in his vocabulary—makes him seem archaic to those accustomed to most later Greek prose. This difference has encouraged his translators to go in for archaism, often with unfortunate results. One is not surprised to find this tendency in Rawlinson's version of 1854–60 or in

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A. D. Godley's Loeb translation of 1920. But as recently as 1949, John Enoch Powell, now better known as a politician than as a scholar, rendered Herodotus into what he claims to be "the English of the Authorized Version." It is not; and if it were, the language would have misleading associations. The reaction in the opposite direction, which may be seen in the Penguin translation of Aubrey de Selincourt, is excessive; there the Greek is done into flat, functional modern prose, about as distinguished as that of Agatha Christie, which, like the grossly overrated versions of Homer by E. V. Rieu in the same series, gives no notion that the original has any special literary quality.

Professor Grene is rightly critical of the Penguin version; he feels that the English should be "direct, powerful and clear," and so for most of the time his English is. But unfortunately he also feels that it should be "a little odd," and later he adds that it must be "literary and whimsical." That has caused him to adorn his text with a patina of archaism, for the most part fairly thin, but all the same unfortunate. Thus Gyges tries to escape from Candaules's demand "in dread lest some evil should come to himself out of these things"; the herdsman saves the child Cyrus "of whom he should have been the deathsman"; and at the end of the history, Cyrus says that "it is not possible that from the same land stems a growth of wondrous fruit and men who are good soldiers."

Herodotus's Greek is not difficult, and mistranslations are rare, though I found a bad one on page 248, where a sentence that means that in a democracy officials are elected by lot, as in the Athenian democracy some but not all officials were, is rendered "the government holds office by decision of lot."

Professor Grene in his introduction loyally defends Herodotus against those who misunderstand his notion of history; but neither here nor in the brief notes and appendices does he do much to supply the historical background. In this respect the Penguin version has an advantage, having been equipped in 1972 with a new introduction by a well-qualified scholar in Dr. A. R. Burn. Yet despite his touches of whimsy, Professor Grene's version is not surpassed by any other now available in English.

The Great Unread

LOOK HOMEWARD: A LIFE OF THOMAS WOLFE. *By David Herbert Donald. Little, Brown. $24.95.*

Reviewed by JANET GROTH

David Herbert Donald's recent biography, *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe,* offers the occasion for a full-dress reassessment of Wolfe's place in American literature. So doubtful has that place become that I found it necessary to take the occasion also to ask, "Can Wolfe still be read?" Before turning to Donald's biography, therefore, I reread the four gigantic novels—*Look Homeward, Angel, Of Time and the River, The Web and the Rock,* and *You Can't Go Home Again*—and the collection of short stories entitled *From Death to Morning* that make up Wolfe's major fiction. Five weeks and some five thousand pages later, I came away from that experience with the answer, "Yes, Wolfe can be read and probably should be read—but, oh, the pain!" Faulkner's celebrated endorsement of Wolfe as the first-ranking of his contemporaries—on the grounds that, though Wolfe failed and failed "greatly," he did so trying "to do the greatest of the impossible . . . to reduce all human experience to literature"—seems more apt than ever.

When I turned to the preface of Donald's biography, I found myself in agreement with the assessment Donald gives there: " . . . remarkably uneven, Thomas Wolfe wrote more bad prose than any other major writer I can think of." (Dreiser evidently did not come to mind, but he might well have, and, had he done so, knocked Wolfe out of the top spot.) Yet, Donald writes, "much of his work is extraordinarily brilliant and moving. . . . [He] created dozens of unforgettable characters. . . . Though the novels lack form, episodes in them are strong and crisply defined. . . . His account of the final days of Benjamin Gant is deeply moving, but it is surpassed by the scene in *Of Time and the River* based on . . . the last hours of his father. . . . [E]ven more memorable . . . [is] the author's unique literary voice. . . . [H]ardly a

JANET GROTH teaches English at the State University of New York, Plattsburgh.

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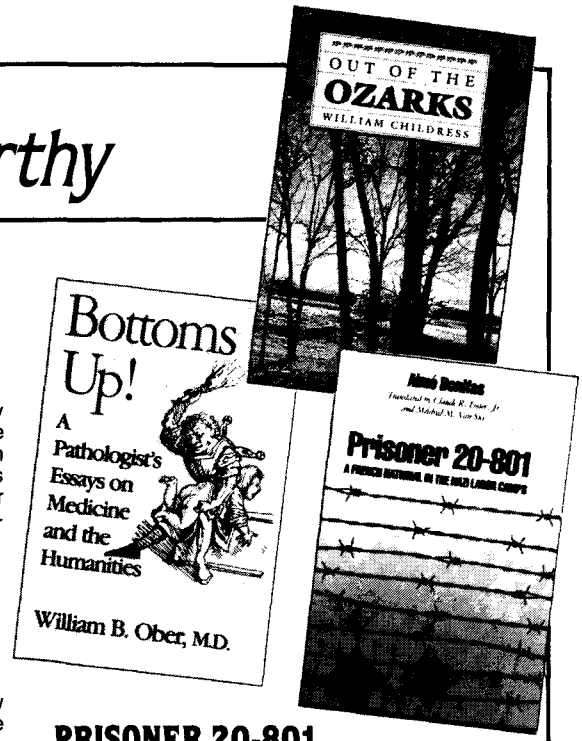

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page . . . could have been written by anybody else." But, Donald goes on to say, it is in Wolfe's lyrical passages "that his prose is most distinctive. . . . These are not the work of a cautious . . . or of a conventional writer. . . . But they help to explain why so many of Wolfe's contemporaries thought him a genius." Donald concludes that rereading these passages "makes it clear that Wolfe deserves to be ranked among the very great American authors."

Donald is a Mississippian whose youthful identification with and enthusiasm for Wolfe's prose faded and was rekindled decades later when, as a historian at work on the Reconstruction period (he teaches history at Harvard), he began tracing the development of Southern literature. Donald states as two of his main objectives in *Look Homeward:* first, the desire to offer a non-critical, non-interpretive, non-psychological version of Wolfe's life story—"to present him as a man, like all men, full of contradictions and ambiguities"; and second, by offering a study of the publishing history of Wolfe's books, to give a fuller account of what he was trying to do. Thus, says Donald, he hopes to spur those unfamiliar with Wolfe's novels to read them and those who dislike Wolfe to read him afresh.

To these announced objectives Donald brings formidable skills as a researcher and organizer of massive documentary materials—all of which he has managed to digest and render into a manageable length and a readable narrative. Viewed strictly as a chronicle, then, his biography leaves a commendably complete record that must be considered close to definitive. But, as to how well his biography succeeds in attaining the objectives described in the preface, I must conclude that it has not accomplished either objective with unqualified success.

Take, first, the matter of telling Wolfe's life story without judgment or any resemblance to a psychological case history. Although I have no doubt that such was Donald's sincere intent, the biography he has in fact produced bears traces of both damning judgments and undue psychologizing. Perhaps a temperamental incompatibility mitigates against Donald's being able to view Wolfe's romantic excess with much sympathy or tolerance. A comparison with Andrew Turnbull's graceful, if incomplete, 1967 biography is instructive here. Turnbull's portrait of Wolfe as a great, bumbling, larger-than-life romantic who was his own worst enemy may of course be open to the charge that it is itself the product of some romanticizing. Yet one feels that Turnbull's biography is fundamentally sound and closer to the truth of Wolfe's spirit than the narcissistic, blubbering, crybaby that Donald gives us, though there is no denying that Donald's is the more fully documented picture.

One explanation of the difference might be that the point of view in each biography is pronouncedly different. The single most prevalent device by which Turnbull sets forth Wolfe's "contradictions" is to show his frequently self-centered, narrow, immature behavior balanced by almost immediate impulses of generosity, contrition, and self-criticism. "Wolfe's conduct was sometimes hard to justify," Turnbull writes, "but as Perkins once remarked, 'he was a truly great man and not a petty one' and when his passions led him astray, he was ashamed of it afterwards." Donald's view of the same behavior precludes him from showing it to the reader in such a sympathetic light:

> Buffeted back and forth [as the object of competition between his alcoholic father and his possessive mother], Wolfe grew up lonely and confused. In response to the contradictory signals given by his parents and his siblings, he developed a pattern of emotional ambivalence which he retained for the rest of his life. In a conversation or a letter he would blurt out his candid feelings and then—especially when they were negative or hostile feelings—instantly attempt to retract them.

Thus, every act of contrition or impulse of his better nature is the result not of a basically generous spirit but of a neurotic fear. Donald's view leads him to say of Wolfe at the period in his life when he is struggling to bring forth a successor to *Of Time and the River:* "The only people he could get along with were those who demanded nothing from him and gave him unqualified admiration."

The colder eye Donald casts upon Wolfe may also be in part the inevitable result of the changed ground rules of biography since the intervening twenty years when Turnbull wrote. I refer to the new mandate for full disclosure that Leon Edel has written about—and expressed concern over—that is, a complete explication regarding sexual matters that in earlier biographies would have been ren-

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dered through euphemism or paraphrase or would have been excluded altogether.

In Wolfe's case, this material is certainly part of what makes him so unattractive in Donald's portrait. Perhaps only to be expected in a sexually experienced bachelor, Wolfe, the newly lionized darling of New York society, went through a period of promiscuity, which, as recounted in Turnbull, was rather roguish and charming. But in Donald's biography, where Wolfe's sexual exploits are itemized and crudely explicit, such behavior becomes another drain upon the reader's fast-diminishing reserves of sympathy. Other intimacies that Donald reveals have a presumed literary significance. Ostensibly, literary history is enhanced by the information that Wolfe was convinced he wrote more vigorous prose when he did so with his pen in one hand and his member in the other, but I should like to know how this might be so.

As for the publishing history Donald offers, one can only stand in awe of the diligence with which he has tracked down every piece of paper representing every extant version of everything Wolfe ever wrote—a quantity that has already become legendary, partly through Wolfe's own boastful accounts of it in *The Story of a Novel*. But again, the biographer fails to see the disparity between his objective and his achievement. Donald asserts that his biography "offers an inside view of the world of publishing" and purports to delineate the process with insights illuminating the frustrations of the writer-editor relationship.

Here the very training and qualifications that constitute Donald's strengths as a scholar and historian lead him to make interpretations of the facts that are perhaps appropriate to scholarly publishing but that are extremely misleading and sometimes just plain wrong with regard to editing fiction in magazines and trade books. For example, Donald is generally cool toward and critical of Maxwell Perkins's celebrated labors in bringing forth Wolfe's first two novels at Scribner's. He goes on to attack Edward C. Aswell, the editor of Wolfe's two posthumously published novels with Harper and Row, writing that "Aswell took impermissible liberties with Wolfe's manuscript," that "his interference seriously eroded the integrity of Wolfe's text," and that his "editorial interference was, both from the standpoint of literature and of ethics, unacceptable." But, without these editors, might not Wolfe's novels have been so ponderous as to be unreadable? The only extensive example of Aswell's editorial interference that Donald offers—a fascinating double-column selection from the McHarg section of *You Can't Go Home Again*—demonstrates nothing of the kind.

In short, the conclusions Donald reaches are marred by an imperfect grasp of literary, as distinguished from scholarly, editing. This creates, unfortunately, one final discrepancy between what Donald hoped his book would accomplish and what, in my judgment, it does not—that is, to so illuminate Wolfe's trials and gifts as a writer that the reader of *Look Homeward* would be disposed to turn or return to the novels themselves.

The opposite is more likely. As the interpreter of Wolfe's gifts, Donald betrays throughout his biography a most unfortunate tin ear, choosing as the supreme example of Wolfe's lyric gift one of his most jejune effusions over the month of October, with its bees that "bore into the belly of the yellowed grape" and its sun that "goes down in blood and pollen." The example is hard to forgive since Donald might so easily have quoted the lines at the very beginning of Wolfe's first novel, which end in the haunting, "O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again!"

If the measure of effectiveness in the biography of a man or woman of letters is that it quickens our interest in its subject and sends us back to the work with new understanding, I am afraid Donald's effort operates as a countervailing force to our doing either.

Charlie's Angels

THE BLIND WATCHMAKER. *By Richard Dawkins. Norton. $18.95.*

Reviewed by MICHAEL LEVIN

You're not supposed to be able to tell a book by its cover, but its cover tells you a lot about Richard Dawkins's *The Blind Watchmaker*. It shows an Earth opening up like a pocket

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watch, with watchworks inside. The subtitle reads: *Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design.* The reader knows at once that he is in the presence of imagination, precision, terseness, and immense intellectual power.

Dawkins is an evolutionary biologist whose first book, *The Selfish Gene,* did much to legitimate the view that human behavior is to an important extent the innate product of evolutionary forces. In this book he is out to explain how Darwinism answers the greatest of all questions, "the ultimate explanation of why we exist," without appealing to an extramundane intelligent creator. According to evolutionary theory, we are the net result of small, unplanned but adaptive changes that have accumulated over eons of time. Mutation proposes, environment selectively disposes, and we are the filtrate. Not only is God an explanatory fifth wheel, Dawkins argues, but God's existence itself would have to be explained by natural selection. Anything capable of planning evolution would have to be very complex, and the only non-circular explanation of complexity that there can be is the slow accumulation of relatively simple changes.

Dawkins's argument is more familiar to philosophers than he realizes (it was known in outline to Hume), but his suggestion that Darwinism is big news is still well taken, and not merely because of the recent resurgence of Creationism. Darwin's theory has simply not been around long enough—it appeared in 1859—for the human race to absorb it. Its logic and implications have not even begun to sink in.

Chief among these implications is Darwinism's treatment of the observable features of the world that have most shaped mankind's religious consciousness. Why has belief in a deity been so deep and so widespread? A few theologians have attempted to conjure God's existence from a definition—God is by definition perfect, and failure to exist would be an imperfection—but such wordplay can hardly account for the depth of ordinary religious convictions. Many people, of course, have been moved by the spectacle of the starry heavens to postulate a First Cause of All, but many others have comfortably accepted an eternal uncreated cosmos—and, anyway, a First Cause invites familiar schoolboy riddles about Who created It. Yet almost everyone, including the skeptic, has marveled at the ordered complexity of living nature. At first glance, and many glances thereafter, it seems unthinkable that the same blind forces that produce mountains and thunderstorms could have produced insect camouflage or bat radar or the hawk's eye. Such phenomena seem to require reference to a conscious purpose. The French savant Antoine-Vincent Arnauld called the human body "a machine so perfect only God could have made it." In the famous analogy from which Dawkins adapted his title, William Paley compared the world to a watch and argued that it can reasonably be supposed to be the product only of something like a watchmaker.

The logical soft spot in Paley's analogy is the possibility of an unobvious power or "principle of order" within matter itself capable of producing eyes and bat echolocation as well as mountains. Before Darwin, however, this idea was too nebulous to be taken seriously. Paley was merely expressing pre-Darwinian common sense when he declared: "[No man] can even form to himself an idea of what is meant by a principle of order, distinct from the intelligence of the watchmaker." The great achievement of Darwin and his followers, chiefly statistical geneticists and molecular biologists, was to articulate such a principle and document its actual operation in nature.

Dawkins's own considerable achievement is to make the conceptual core of these discoveries overwhelming to the rational mind, and indirectly to vindicate fundamentalist hostility to Darwin. With unfailing inventiveness, Dawkins explains tricky ideas like complexity, improbability, and randomness, and shows how simple processes can indeed generate "prodigies of apparent miracle." The key is that each step in the process be very small. It is true enough, as critics of Darwin are forever observing, that a fully developed eye could not have sprung in a single step from totally blind organisms. It is then suggested that 1 percent of an eye—a slight sensitivity to light—would be adaptively useless. Dawkins replies that 1 percent of an eye, a slightly photosensitive patch on an organism's surface—would indeed enable its possessor to find food and evade predators just a little bit

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more efficiently than its blind rivals. (As Dawkins points out, astigmatics who lose their eyeglasses are still better off than the totally blind.) Genes that encode a recipe for a light-sensitive patch would be more apt to reproduce until genes with a recipe for a slightly more sensitive patch came along. For any degree of probability one demands for a mutation, there is a step-size so small that changes that small will occur with the required degree of probability. Given small enough steps and sufficient time, there is a path in "animal space" from light-insensitive viruses to the hawk.

While Dawkins scorns Creationism (although he does its followers the courtesy of attempting to meet their arguments), he is almost as impatient with the much-publicized "punctuated equilibrium" school founded by Niles Eldridge and Stephen Jay Gould. Punctuationists (or "punk ekes," as they have been called in their profession) maintain that evolution does not proceed at a uniform speed, but undergoes relatively fast and slow periods. In a chapter gamesomely entitled "Puncturing Punctuationism," Dawkins shows this criticism to oppose only a caricature of Darwinism. He compares punctuationists' discovery to the discovery that, in taking forty years to cross the two hundred miles of the Sinai desert, the Israelites did not travel precisely twenty-four yards each and every day. Once it is granted that evolution is piecewise and unplanned, punctuationism becomes a "minor wrinkle" blown out of proportion by the media. ("It is as if the discovery that the Earth is not a perfect sphere but a slightly flattened spheroid were given banner treatment under the headline: COPERNICUS WRONG. FLAT EARTH THEORY VINDICATED.")

Apart from a vague reference to "those who have no reason to deny that evolution has happened but who, often for political or ideological reasons, find Darwin's theory of its *mechanism* distasteful," Dawkins tiptoes around the question of why reputable biologists would publicly exaggerate supposed deficiencies of Darwinism. In Gould's case it would seem to be a matter of commitment to Marxism, one of whose dogmas is that all change is discontinuous—punctuated, if you will.

The interesting point is that Darwinism sits

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no more easily with the secular Left than it does with the religious Right. No pre-Darwinian conception of man and society is likely to survive. From a rigorously Darwinian perspective, human morality is neither like the command of God nor a human convention, but rather is the product of biology. It also appears that natural selection has endowed mankind with a cluster of instinctual drives that limit what manipulation of the social environment can accomplish in the way of changing human behavior. These drives may no longer be adaptive or attractive, but they are not going to be altered in anything but geological time, and we had better get used to that.

Dawkins obviously sees all this; he makes the reader see it too. With his cheetahs engaged in an arms race with the ever-evolving "annual mean gazelle" and biomorphs evolving within his own personal computer, the deep feeling that Dawkins communicates for natural selection should hasten mankind's reckoning with the Darwinian worldview.

WOM

THE WISE MEN: SIX FRIENDS AND THE WORLD THEY MADE. *By Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas. Simon & Schuster. $22.50.*

Reviewed by FAREED ZAKARIA

On the morning of March 26, 1968, a group of men gathered in the Cabinet Room of the White House. Lyndon Johnson had summoned them there to ask what should be done about the intractable war in Vietnam. Their advice was unequivocal, and the President wrote it down: "Can no longer do job we set out to do. . . . Move to disengage." Six days later he announced on national television that he would be taking immediate steps to "de-escalate the conflict" in Southeast Asia.

Not one of the people in that room was a member of Johnson's administration. Their éminence grise, Dean Acheson, had last been in government almost twenty years earlier as Harry Truman's secretary of state, but their past experience was precisely why President Johnson had called on them. These aging men were the original architects of all that was sinking in the swamps of Vietnam. When in office, they had worked together to help the Allies win the Second World War; in the peace that followed, they had created the role that America was to play as it was thrust onto the center of the world stage. Since then, they had served as advisers whenever a president had needed them. Critics on the left decried what they called "the New York foreign policy syndicate"; the populist right fulminated against "the eastern liberal establishment." But staffers at the White House had nicknamed them the "WOM"—the Wise Old Men.

The Wise Men is a narrative account of the formation of American foreign policy from World War II to Vietnam, as seen through the interconnected lives of six of these men: W. Averell Harriman, Robert A. Lovett, Dean Acheson, John J. McCloy, Charles Bohlen, and George F. Kennan. Using this ingenious construct, the authors, Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, take the reader on a journey that moves beyond foreign policy into social history as well, for they claim that their six subjects "as individuals and even more so as a group . . . embody what has been called . . . the American Establishment." The story is told as a heroic tragedy of sorts—a tale of six bold patriots, born and bred to lead, who fought isolation, rebuilt Europe, thwarted the Soviet Union, but ended their lives watching their legacy disintegrate in an agonizing war thousands of miles away.

It all begins, write the authors, "with boys rowing at a New England prep school and riding horses in the snow on a sprawling ranch in Idaho." W. Averell Harriman was raised in the kind of wealth that has not been seen since income and inheritance taxes were established. The eldest son of railroad tycoon E. H. Harriman, Averell grew up in grand townhouses on Fifth Avenue and vacationed at the family's twenty-thousand-acre, hundred-room estate, complete with its own polo field. While none of the other five men came from quite such an extraordinary background, they all went through the small network of prep schools, colleges, clubs, and jobs that were the privileged domain of the American elite. Beginning with the childhood associations (Harriman and Lovett), the story moves

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from the prep schools of Groton (Harriman and Acheson) and St. Paul's (Bohlen), to the senior societies at Yale (Acheson, Lovett, and Harriman), to Felix Frankfurter's lectures at the Harvard Law School (Acheson and McCloy), to their jobs in New York and Washington.

Those who were not born into this milieu could still be accepted and assimilated. George Kennan came from a decidedly middle-class background before his years at Princeton and the then clublike Foreign Service. For John McCloy, who went to Amherst on a scholarship, acceptance into the establishment took longer. While some of these men knew each other previously, the pivotal point in this story—at which the paths of the two bankers (Harriman and Lovett), two lawyers (Acheson and McCloy), and two diplomats (Bohlen and Kennan) converge—is World War II. Harriman and Acheson ran the economic aid to the United States's allies, while at the War Department Lovett and McCloy transformed a dormant military into the largest war machine in history. Kennan and Bohlen began a slow process of educating Washington about the Soviet Union, culminating dramatically in Kennan's "long telegram" on containment.

The last years of the Truman administration were this group's heyday. Their success in wartime, coupled with Roosevelt's death, had made them extraordinarily influential: Acheson was secretary of state and Lovett secretary of defense; Harriman was administrator of the Marshall Plan and then ambassador to Moscow; McCloy was governor of Germany and then president of the World Bank; and Bohlen and Kennan were the nation's top Soviet experts. They survived the wrath of Joseph McCarthy and the "exile" of the Eisenhower years. But they could not survive Vietnam. They watched their protégés (McGeorge Bundy, Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk) make policies that repeatedly and relentlessly failed—failed in the simple concrete sense that the policies did not achieve the goals that had been set for them. Besides the occasional advisory meetings, the March 26, 1968, meeting being the most important, the wise men retreated for the rest of their time into private life.

The Wise Men invites comparison with *The Best and the Brightest*, David Halberstam's study of the Kennedy establishment and the Vietnam War, but the two books are quite different. *The Wise Men* is not solely about U.S. foreign policy; it is about who made that policy and how. Halberstam concentrated upon the content of U.S. policy in Vietnam. His biographies of policymakers were usually presented as short background material to introduce the real issues. For Isaacson and Thomas the biographies are the real issues. What results is as much a history of twentieth-century America's upper class as it is a history of its foreign policy.

The authors have researched their subjects comprehensively, through masses of private papers, unpublished essays and interviews, as well as some more mundane material (one important omission is E. Digby Baltzell's classic, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America*). While most of the narrative is journalistic, the first section gracefully captures the spirit of an era long past—from the "Groton Ethic" of noblesse oblige that pervaded prep schools at the turn of the century, to the Yale of Cole Porter's spirited "smart set," to the partners' room at Brown Brothers Harriman & Co. The portrait is valuable not because of a nostalgic appeal for a gilded age that probably never was (though there is some of that), but rather because the study shows the casual associations and connections that a small homogenous group of people did in fact have. As the story moves on, the authors' subjects come to life and one sees the tortured genius of George Kennan, the unceasing ambition of Averell Harriman, the subtle charm of Robert Lovett, the methodical thoroughness of Jack McCloy, the witty brilliance of Dean Acheson, the diplomatic savoir faire of "Chip" Bohlen.

On issues of foreign policy the authors move with less skill. By and large, they provide a balanced perspective without too much tendentious analysis, but some points stand out. They argue that the wise men had to exaggerate their case against the Soviet Union when selling the Marshall Plan and the idea of containment to Congress, but that subsequently they fell prey to their own rhetoric and began believing it. This notion that the six men duped themselves is quite strange. If these policymakers truly believed everything they told Congress, they certainly were a rare breed. The rhetoric of politics in Washington is—and always has been—the rhetoric of ex-

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aggeration. Another minor irritation is the occasional descent into cliché, as when they are explaining the ineffectiveness of Paul Nitze's opposition to Vietnam—"Nitze was trapped by his Cold War logic"—presenting as common wisdom the argument that Vietnam followed inexorably from containment. Whether this is true or whether the war was a tactical error that did not invalidate containment grand strategy is a point of continuing debate, and one too serious to be dismissed in a flip manner.

The authors are correct when they argue that the wise men urged a tough line against the Soviet Union earlier than anyone else; but they then assert that, had these six men been able to foresee the long cold war their policies caused, "they would have been taken aback." Yet there is no evidence in their handling of any of the problems they faced—the dropping of the atomic bomb, the Berlin blockade, the Korean War—that these six men thought the U.S. could live in a world without international tension in general or vis-à-vis the Soviets in particular. Indeed NSC-68, which they approved as a long-term plan, virtually endorses the idea of a cold war as a response to the Soviet threat, which was particularly acute at that time, the heyday of Stalin's paranoia. Not one of the group, not even Kennan, was an idealist.

It is true that a whole generation of tough internationalists drastically changed their views after Vietnam; but they were Kennedy's "best and brightest," not the wise men. To the end, Acheson argued against negotiations with the Vietnamese, as did Lovett and McCloy, who were for strategic bombings. More recently, Lovett thought Cyrus Vance too cautious and "lawyer-like," and McCloy was on Reagan's transition team. George Kennan was at odds with them, but his anguished wanderings began back in 1948, and he disagreed with his five friends—and most of the rest of the world—from then on. Harriman was the only one of the six men who really changed, and that had a great deal to do with his desire for negotiations above all else (partly because he always saw himself as the negotiator).

The other manner in which this book differs from Halberstam's is that the authors admire their subjects—the cover sketch is a Mt. Rushmore-like frieze of the six men. In fact, the authors' central thesis can be summed up in a quotation they use from Henry Kissinger's *White House Years:* "For the entire postwar period, foreign policy had been ennobled by a group of distinguished men who, having established their eminence in other fields, devoted themselves to public service . . . an aristocracy dedicated to the service of this nation on behalf of principles beyond partisanship." Mr. Isaacson and Mr. Thomas argue in the conclusion that, compared with their subjects, today's ruling elites are more self-serving and less effective.

The idea of linking a nation's foreign policy to its social elites predates the period the authors deal with. Joseph Schumpeter argued that the "new imperialism" of the 1880s and 1890s was a result of the atavism of Europe's ruling nobility. The British historians Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher worked this idea into a thesis: Britain's policies in Africa were decided by what they called "the official mind," a group of statesmen from both parties who were educated at the same schools and colleges, apprenticed under the same people, lived in the same social circle, and hence had very similar world views. America certainly had a similar group of people, a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant establishment. It was less closely knit than the London-based one because it was scattered all over the northeast United States. More important, it was almost exclusively a commercial establishment. Lord David Cecil provides a portrait of the Whig aristocracy in Victorian England in *The Young Melbourne:* "The Whig Lord was so often as not a minister, his eldest son an M.P., his second attached to a foreign embassy, so that their houses were alive with the effort and hurry of politics." In America the upper classes confined themselves to the great banks, law firms, and corporations of the northeast United States. None of the old- or new-line WASPs of the world of Edith Wharton and Henry James was even interested in politics.

By the early twentieth century, established men like Elihu Root and Henry Stimson devoted their lives to public service; upper-class families sent their children into the foreign service and the state department, and the Council on Foreign Relations was founded. But these impulses were sporadic and weak. It was not until World War II that the atmosphere changed. The nature and urgency of

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the cause struck a chord in Ivy-League Americans attached to Europe who believed in a vigorous foreign policy, causing an extraordinary infusion of talent into the government. There was a selfless devotion to the task at hand, and a unity of purpose that could never have occurred in peace. For example, the four most-senior officials in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's War Department were all Republicans—Stimson, Harvey Bundy, McCloy, and Lovett.

Isaacson and Thomas are well aware of the pivotal nature of the war in instilling a deep sense of public service within the establishment and raising it to power; one-half of their book, which begins in the 1890s, is devoted to the nine years from 1940 to 1949. If not for World War II, the "New York foreign policy syndicate" would never have gained the kind of influence it did in Washington. Two other facts made it possible for this group to exert its authority: the consensus on foreign policy that was a product of the war, and the passive role that Congress played in foreign affairs. The first reason has at times been exaggerated; there was as much dissent over China and Korea as there has ever been. On the other hand, it would be impossible to talk of a few appointed statesmen making policy today, because so much of it is made by the senate and even the house of representatives. "There are now 535 Secretaries of State," remarked Lovett of the current state of affairs.

Truman's policy-making elite has been criticized by both the extreme left and right. Neither criticism is accurate, although the criticism from the left is at least consistent. If one believes that containment is evil and the Cold War is a result of U.S. provocation, as some of them do, then the blame must lie with the wise men, for they *were* responsible for the shaping of these policies. The radical right, on the other hand, believes that this establishment sold out U.S. interests and was "soft" on communism. *The Wise Men* provides ample evidence that this charge is based more on moral outrage at communism and a desire to find a scapegoat for its expansion than on an accurate appraisal of the situation. The "Acheson Gang" were as unyielding on the issues they confronted as was realistically possible. In fact, Acheson was often overruled by Truman for political reasons—as, for example, in the case when, as under secretary of

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state, he wanted to slow down the withdrawal of American troops from Europe so that the U.S. could negotiate settlements from a position of military strength.

Both attacks, the one from the left and the one from the right, have one common charge: establishments are elitist conspiracies—in Joseph McCarthy's words, "a conspiracy so immense and an infamy so black as to dwarf any previous venture in the history of man." The aspect of this argument worth considering is to what extent the insulation of a group of policymakers can make them insensitive to the problems of less powerful sections of society. For instance, McCloy's decision not to bomb the train lines to Auschwitz is not, in and of itself, immoral. Perhaps a case can be made that the best way to help all of those being killed or enslaved by Hitler was to defeat him as quickly as possible, but McCloy's inability to sympathize or even quite understand the anguished pleas of Jewish groups in America is inexcusable, as was his cavalier disregard for the civil rights of Americans of Japanese origin when he orchestrated their incarceration. It is not surprising that all six of the wise men thought that the creation of the state of Israel was against U.S. interests.

The general idea that the establishment is some kind of conspiracy is absurd. Consider this scenario. If someone were to write a book on the period of 1968 to 1988, years when every president that was elected was an anti-establishment populist of some sort, the following facts would all be true. George Bush (Andover, Yale), George Shultz (Princeton, University of Chicago), and Caspar Weinberger (Harvard, Harvard Law School) were in cabinet-level positions for four of the five administrations during that time. Henry Kissinger reigned supreme for eight years, and his fellow Harvard men James Schlesinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski (director of the Trilateral Commission) were secretary of defense and national security adviser respectively. His successor, Cyrus Vance, was, like Bush, a member of a Yale senior society. Kissinger's aides rose to prominence as well: Alexander Haig became secretary of state, Brent Scowcroft became national security adviser, Winston Lord (president of the Council on Foreign Relations) became ambassador to China, Lawrence Eagleburger became under secretary of state. When Shultz was in office, he hired his former colleague at the University of Chicago, Kenneth Dam, as deputy secretary of state. Shultz and Weinberger, of course, worked together for years at the Bechtel Corporation. Do we have a conspiracy?

Of course not. These kinds of theories result from misreading the decisions of policymakers, who often and routinely hire people they have known in some context before. Like everyone else in important jobs in the public and private sector, the secretary of state will appoint people to positions of authority whom he trusts and is sure are competent and honest. Inevitably he will have known many of these people in some context before. While more effort might be expended to seek talent outside, surely the answer is not to have the secretary of state place an advertisement for an assistant secretary of state in the newspapers and then review resumes. The worst way one can misread *The Wise Men* is to think of them as a club or cabal. They were nothing of the kind. Indeed there is not a single point in the book when all six men are together at the same place at the same time. They are meant to be a representative sample of the highest echelons of a cohesive establishment. As Isaacson and Thomas write, "These half-dozen friends fit together in a complementary way, epitomizing a style and outlook."

"The American establishment is dead," Walt Rostow said, to which one must add, "Long live the American establishment." America cannot be governed without a group of people in and out of government dedicated to the endeavor. The Carter administration's failure to govern effectively was due in some part to its inability to bring together the shattered post-Vietnam Democratic establishment. This can be seen most dramatically in the Vance-Brzezinski feuds. The Reaganites, the most unabashedly anti-establishment group in decades, realized this necessity on coming to power and quickly (and most successfully) coalesced a new establishment around them: a network of foundations, think tanks, and magazines that works with the public and private sectors.

If some establishment will exist perforce, the question, then, is how today's differs from that of the wise men. What we have today is a meritocracy: well-qualified people, often professional foreign-policy experts, working in a group that does not place much importance on

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social standing. This decline of emphasis on social class is no doubt good, but equally important is what the wise men embodied, which has been lost. An aristocracy, theoretically, is composed of men and women who serve the public good above and beyond self-interest. As the authors describe throughout their book, and explain in the conclusion, the wise men worked together in an atmosphere of trust and by a code of ethics. Along with wealth and privilege, these men inherited a sense of noblesse oblige, a feeling that because they had been given more, more was expected of them. They saw themselves as part of an honorable tradition that transcended party politics and that was accountable to the future. This goes a long way in explaining how six amateurs conducted a foreign policy for their country that was realistic, consistent, and yet principled. Even if they are remembered only for their greatest success, the Marshall Plan, they will still be models to emulate. Messrs. Isaacson and Thomas have given us a primer on public service.

Buzz Word

IMPERIALISM AND THE ANTI-IMPERALIST MIND. *By Lewis Feuer. Prometheus Books. $22.95.*

Reviewed by L. H. GANN

Men throughout the ages have gloried in the splendor of empire. Biblical chroniclers boasted of Solomon (1 Kings 4:21–24) who "reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they bought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life." The Romans exalted in their empire; so did Spaniards, Frenchmen, and Britons many centuries thereafter. From the end of the last century, however, imperialism increasingly fell into disrepute. The very term turned into a word of abuse. Imperialism (and its subspecies colonialism) came to be regarded as an unmitigated evil, apt to engender almost all the ills known to mankind—pride, warmongering, economic exploitation, psychological degradation of colonial subjects, and even "underdevelopment" in the Third World. "There is no reason to believe that the case for imperialism (there was a case, there is a case) can be argued today," concluded Sir Denis Brogan, in an article in the *Observer* entitled, characteristically, "The Word that Lost Its Savour."

Lewis Feuer therefore is a brave man. In writing his present book, he decided to swim against the tide—as he has so often done in the past. The author is not of course an advocate of empire building pure and simple. He distinguishes between different forms, contrasting "regressive" imperialism with "progressive" imperialism. The former he identifies with Spanish imperialism in the New World, or with King Leopold II's ill-fated "Congo Free State" in Central Africa. Regressive imperialism entailed the imposition of economic as well as political controls over subject peoples and "an economy of spoilation" (*Raubwirtschaft* in the original German usage). Both stand harshly condemned.

Constructive imperialism, on the other hand, served a progressive function through the transfer from the West to the Third World of new methods of production, new methods of administration, new technologies, and new ways of thought. Feuer praises, for instance, British imperialism, as practiced in the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century. The empire builders in India and Africa were conquerors with a difference. Unlike Tutsi, Zulu, Ndebele, or Masai warlords in precolonial Africa, the colonial powers were the pioneers of modernity. They pioneered railways, modern forms of mining and manufacturing, modern medicine and veterinary science. They built modern schools and hospitals and agricultural research stations; they were modern Africa's city builders par excellence. They laid the foundations of the modern state. In short, they initiated an economic and social revolution of unprecedented extent. This feat was not accomplished without grave social costs, without its quota of abuses and cruelties. But this element should not be overestimated. Imperialism of the reformist kind in Africa rested on a coercive machinery

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startlingly small in size, especially when compared with the military buildup in the post-colonial successor states. To give just one example, between 1900 and 1950, the British in peacetime ran Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), a country larger than Great Britain, Germany, and the Low Countries put together, with an armed force of no more than eight hundred men (including thirty-seven British officers and NCOs)—as opposed to twenty times that number who serve in the Zambian army more than twenty years after decolonization.

Feuer's distinction between "progressive" and "regressive" imperialism will not gain him good marks in most African Studies or Latin American Studies centers—any more than a more restricted study done by Peter Duignan and myself (*Burden of Empire*, Hoover Institution Press, 1977), which concerned only sub-Saharan Africa. Feuer's conclusions, however, would not have shocked Karl Marx. According to Marx, the British intervention in India had produced the greatest, in truth the only, social revolution experienced in Asia. British drill sergeants, railway engineers, telegraphists, bridge-builders, teachers, and administrators between them helped to break the mold of immemorial tradition. Between them, they contributed to the dissolution of the caste system and thereby helped to usher in a happier future. As regards the colonial question, Marx and Kipling in fact had many assumptions in common. Kipling, in his often-misquoted poem "The White Man's Burden," had called on the would-be empire builders to "fill full the mouth of Famine, and bid the sickness cease." According to Feuer, this is precisely what the best of empire builders achieved—and under difficult circumstances. Progressive imperialists comprised among their numbers Jews as well as Christians, and Feuer outlines, in an interesting case study, the role played by such Jewish pioneers of empire as Eduard Schnitzer (Emin Pasha) and Sir Matthew Nathan.

Given his own assumptions, Feuer does not display much sympathy for the modern critics of empire. He subjects Leninists and quasi-Leninist views of empire to a searching critique. He points to the manner in which imperialism incurred censure for the most contradictory and mutually incompatible reasons. For example, John A. Hobson (who greatly influenced Lenin) deplored the export of capital from the metropole to the empire. According to Hobson, the Western capitalists should have invested their profits at home, thereby improving the Western workers' living standards, instead of exploiting the colonies. No, said Eduard Kardelj, Marshal Tito's foreign minister, a Leninist of impeccable credentials. The Western capitalists deserved censure for *failing* to export sufficient capital to the underdeveloped countries. Hence the underdeveloped nations were prevented from absorbing industrial goods. By contrast, the capital-glutted Western countries raised their own levels of consumption at the poor countries' expense.

Thus the contradictory charge sheet continued. The imperialists incurred blame for spreading their own language and culture and thereby promoting "cultural imperialism." At the same time, the imperialists were attacked for giving inadequate attention to educating their subjects, thereby practicing cultural restrictionism and cultural apartheid. Economic development promoted by the imperial rulers was condemned for shattering time-honored folkways, for spreading Western materialism and habits of consumption. But the imperialists were also denounced for perpetuating economic underdevelopment. Imperialism indeed was endowed with an almost demiurgic quality. Why did the working classes in Western countries fail to join a communist revolution? Because the "aristocracy of labor" had been bought off by colonial super-profits. Why did the bourgeoisie in the Western European countries fail to embrace Fascism, as their confreres had done in Germany? Because the Western bourgeoisie had colonial empires to exploit—a common argument during the 1930s. Yet colonialism supposedly also contained the seeds of Fascism—a thesis argued by Hannah Arendt.

Feuer has no patience with such interpretations. Whereas other historians have critically discussed the real or assumed mind-sets of imperialism, Feuer analyzes the anti-imperialist mind. Feuer writes: "Theories of imperialism, proposed by Marxist and neo-Marxist ideologists, have been covert emotive propositions for inducing a Western historical guilt. To do so, all of them are obliged to suppress evidence, and all have seen their chief predic-

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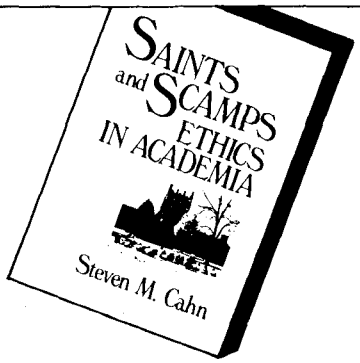
tions falsified. Most profess to believe that imperialism, the alleged 'last stage' in a moribund capitalism, will be followed by the birth of a new and higher civilization. 'Imperialism,' a word once bearing a connotation of pride, has been wrested from political reality and 'masochized' with a variety of fantasies." Discerning viewers who have watched such programs as "The Africans: A Triple Heritage," a recent TV series produced at the British and American taxpayers' expense, will agree.

Critiques of imperialism commonly expressed the most extraordinary expectations (especially during the 1950s and 1960s) regarding the splendid future that would be Africa's, once the imperial yoke had shattered. Western and African intellectuals during the period of decolonization in Africa often did a disservice to Africa by their exaggerated hopes about the benefits that independence would bring. Bloodthirsty dictators, men such as Sékou Touré in Guinea, received much encouragement from progressive intellectuals in the West, from men and women who lived by the three monkeys' injunction: "hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil." Gwendolen Carter, overall a writer of sensible, moderate views, thus wrote in *African One-Party States* (1962) that Sékou Touré's single-party dictatorship aimed at "the liberation of the people of its country from poverty, illiteracy, and apathy. In such tasks many Africans feel, with more than a little justification, that there is no room for disagreement or divided efforts." Sékou Touré's bloodstained record disappointed such hopes. So did Uganda's—to give another example. When the British left Uganda in 1962, they left behind a country with a balanced budget, a favorable balance of trade, a stable currency, a reputable university college. There was security of person and property; there was a modest degree of prosperity. The armed forces were tiny. (At the time of independence, the security forces amounted to no more than 2,000 men, the police 5,500 men—this to maintain order in a country of nearly seven million inhabitants.) Twenty-five years later, Uganda has been reduced to murderous chaos, compared with which the British colonial era seems Uganda's golden age.



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Feuer, while lauding progressive imperialism, has no patience with Soviet imperialism. Soviet imperialism has wreaked havoc in Eastern Europe. Soviet-backed regimes have done even worse in Third World countries such as Angola or Ethiopia. Moreover, Soviet imperialism, unlike the capitalist imperialisms of the past, cannot coexist peaceably with other social systems, according to Feuer, "for an alternative philosophy and way of life is regarded as a threatening class menace." Feuer therefore calls on the U.S. to develop an "American Participatory Imperialism" to take up the Soviet challenge more effectively than hitherto. Feuer has surely chosen the wrong term, for what he means is to strengthen an alliance of free states.

Despite these and some other blemishes, Feuer's work deserves to be widely read and widely discussed. Whether this will occur is another matter. The historical interpretations attacked by Feuer serve too many interests—economic, ideological, political, and psychological—to be discarded with alacrity.

Big Spender

COLLECTED POEMS, 1928–1985. *By Stephen Spender. Random House. $19.95.*

JOURNALS, *1939–1983. By Stephen Spender, edited by John Goldsmith. Random House. $19.95.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

At one point in his *Journals*, Stephen Spender recalls Auden saying to him, when they were undergraduates at Oxford, "You will be a poet because you will always be humiliated." (Spender's 1951 autobiography, *World Within World* has Auden saying ". . . because you are so infinitely capable of being humiliated.") A few years later, Virginia Woolf paid him the following tribute: "He talks incessantly and will pan out in years to come a prodigious bore. But he's a nice poetic youth—big nosed, bright eyed, like a giant thrush." It is typical of Spender in his *Journals* that he should refer again to Auden's analysis of his capacity for humiliation, and that he should quote—as if he were proud of it—Woolf's prediction that he would become a prodigious bore. And in case the predictions of his betters were not sufficient to establish the quality of his character and talent, he himself steps in and lays it on the line: "Looking back on the evening it seems to me I did most of the talking. Boasted. Was falsely modest about my own writing—difficult for me not to be falsely modest—because it is rubbed into me by every stroke of my pen that my natural talent, facility, concentration is something to be modest about." In a few more strokes of the humiliating pen, he has rubbed it in further; and indeed these hundreds of pages of journals, added to the two hundred pages of poems he wishes to preserve, should convince any reader that Spender's artistic talent is one truly to be modest about. At the same time, such a recognition deters him not at all from adding two more books to an already bursting bibliography of novels, plays, literary and political criticism, cultural commentary. Stephen Spender is a unique literary and public phenomenon.

It is a phenomenon that—as F. R. Leavis said about the Sitwells—belongs more to the history of publicity than of poetry. Thus there is much more to say about the *Journals* than about the poems, which, if some of them were ever alive in the 1930s, are now dead as doornails. Although Spender has pruned and trimmed the products of almost sixty years, the result is less than inspiriting. The old thirties chestnuts are there yet once more—"The Express," "The Landscape Near an Aerodrome," "The Pylons," "An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum," the poem about his parents that begins in matchless bathos with "My parents kept me from children who were rough,"—above all, the egregious "I think continually of those who were truly great" (now given a new boring title, "The Truly Great"). In "content," their level of flatulence is extremely high:

> The guns spell money's ultimate reason
> In letters of lead on the Spring hillside.
> But the boy lying dead under the olive trees
> Was too young and too silly
> To have been notable to their important eye.
> He was a better target for a kiss.

Tiens! one says to that silly last line from the first section of "Ultima Ratio Regum"; just as

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well for the silly young lad to have been put out of his misery, rather than hanging around, a target for kisses.

But it is not merely the flatulence count of these early poems that makes them so dispensable; it's also their rhythmic inertness. It was bad enough for Spender to have gone on about how he thought

. . . continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light, where the hours are suns,
Endless and singing.

(One thinks of Philip Larkin's directive, "Get stewed: / Books are a load of crap.") But forget the content of the poem's second stanza and just listen to how it sounds:

What is precious, is never to forget
The essential delight of the blood drawn from ageless springs
Breaking through rocks in worlds before our earth.
Never to deny its pleasure in the morning simple light
Nor its grave evening demand for love.
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog, the flowering of the spirit.

"What is precious, is never . . ."; "Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother"—the ineptness of these rhythms is staggering, until one realizes that Spender doesn't presume to be any great shakes as a prosodist: "Continued sonnet on Berlin Wall. . . . Usual torments of writing poetry . . . my utter incompetence technically and lack of certainty about form I want." He said it, I didn't.

As a poet, his utter absence of humor is crippling, as is his commitment to a high, "spiritual" diction that fills poems with Spirit and blood and love and death. For him, the neck of eloquence somehow never got wrung—he really *did* think continually of those who were truly great: "Instead of being a fake great man, I wanted to be a real great writer. I have resisted my own ambition by sabotaging it for years." In fact, when in poems at the end of this collection he relaxed a bit and wrote about MacNeice or Stravinsky or Auden, drawing on remembered details of his experiences with them, the result is welcome. But such poems are very much the exception. In the *Journals*, on the other hand, relaxation is the rule, and if they don't contain much overtly humorous material, they do show engaging instances of Spender regarding himself with less than monumental seriousness, sometimes even emerging as a comic hero.

Inevitably for such a jet-setting lit man, there is a good deal of name-dropping, or at least naming: Oppenheimer and Kennan, Boulez and Bob Craft, Margot and Rudolf and Jackie O. When he drives T. S. Eliot to the Savoy Hotel—as if that in itself weren't enough—it is of course to meet Stravinsky; when—in the *Journals*' most bizarre episode, he appears to be marooned in Oneonta, New York, after a lecture, the pathos is that he's on for dinner that evening in New York City, with Mrs. Onassis and her daughter Caroline ("I had not seen Jacqueline for twenty years or so . . ."). The *Journals* exploit bodily embarrassments that the poems avert their eyes from. In Japan, he is squired about by a "boring professor" who invites himself to Spender's hotel room and announces that "We shall now take a multitudinous bath, after which you will feel greatly refreshed." In probably his finest moment, Spender

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boldly confides to his journal that, "the idea of having a bath with this professor really infuriated me." Nevertheless, it seems, he had it. On the lecture circuit in Las Cruces, New Mexico, he is afflicted with violent diarrhea at the beginning of his talk, hangs on gamely, then afterwards dashes for a lavatory where he encounters an elderly gentleman emerging from one of the stalls, saying, "Didn't I meet you twenty years ago?" This time Spender firmly draws the line: "Excuse me, I'll speak to you afterwards, outside," and dashes into the vacated place.

My favorite journal entry is his tale of the Wagnerian fart:

> Some weeks ago in London I walked along Long Acre from Covent Garden where I had seen *Götterdämmerung*—alone as I thought, along the street I farted. It was much louder, after five hours of Wagner, than I had dreamed it could possibly be! Some boys and girls, rather charming, whom I had scarcely noticed, overheard me, or it, and started cheering. In the darkness I was more amused than embarrassed. Then a self-important thought came in my mind. Supposing they knew that this old man walking along Long Acre and farting was Stephen Spender? What would they think?

The answer is, obviously, that the charming boys and girls were thinking continually of those who were truly great—or at least who sounded as though they might be. Surely the cheers were a version of that acclaim Spender imagines for himself when, in a recounted dream, he is made Pope and waits to deliver his first sermon before a million people.

In effect he has been Poetry Pope, teaching or lecturing or reading his poetry at every college and university in America. That, on the edge of eighty, he should want to do this (he is in residence part of this academic year at the University of Connecticut) has seemed on occasion a mystery even to him: "It seems to me quite ridiculous I should spend so much of my life in such desultory circumstances, at my age when I ought to be surrounded by family, troops of friends, and a little honour."

So he wrote in January 1979, describing the view from his tenth-floor room at the Holiday Inn in Nashville, and comparing it with other grim places of recent abode in Charlottesville and Houston. It can't just be economic necessity (though he pulls in hefty amounts for a lecture) but must involve keeping his name up there in lights: "My heart really does do something journalistic—stop a beat, give a jump—if my eye hooks on to the printed word 'Spender' or even—now I am getting a bit astigmatic—any conformation of letters like it. ('Spring,' for example.)" Under such conditions, even reading the daily paper must be an exciting event.

The details of various readings in the States give further confirmation to his success as a public figure. At Bates College seven hundred students (out of an enrolled twelve hundred!) turn up for his reading, which has to be moved to the chapel. "At the University of Maine I was banqueted in a way that I found discomforting. Before the banquet I had to stand in a line with dignitaries. This followed on my reading, which was introduced by the President of the University, who recited lines of 'I think continually' at me." Whether it is Mt. Vernon, Iowa, or Centre College, Kentucky, or Detroit, Michigan, the beat goes on, as does an accompaniment of self-castigation: "Distracted, lazy, pleasure-seeking, frivolous, ever ready to fall in with other people's wishes, desiring to please them, fearful of losing their good will. Years wasted, slipping hour by hour, day by day in a routine of undertaking external to my own inner tasks—reviewing, editing, party-going, travelling, attending conferences, UNESCO, *Encounter*, teaching." The reader can scarcely keep a dry eye.

Despite large doses of candor, Spender does not quite bare his soul on all matters. There are frequently mentions of "B"—"an ornithologist, who also took my writing course at Gainesville"—whom he visits in the man's trailer near the Sewanee River: "With his pale green-grey shining eyes and dark brown hair, he looks more than ever like a portrait of a young Frenchman by Manet." One's curiosity is ever so slightly piqued. On other occasions he can be sharply forthright, reckless of his own future welfare, as when he describes Germaine Greer as having "the look of an overgrown schoolgirl who has won all the prizes and has never quite got round to tidying herself up. Nor does she want to." Or when, in momentary exasperation, he refers to Archibald MacLeish (whom some thought of as the American Spender) as a "humbug."

The *Journals*' final pages record the ambiguous gifts given to the public man as he approaches his ninth decade. The prime min-

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ister recommends him for the knighthood; Sir Stephen did not decline. But on the very last page the then knight-to-be confronts death with only one question in mind: "Will my immortal work be written?" Using the adjective without embarrassment, the old poet still hopes to produce something Truly Great. But perhaps his question was already answered, when he shrewdly compared himself to his father, a Liberal politician and author who had written "journalistic books about subjects he hadn't really studied and hoping that feelings, intuitions, sympathies would carry him through." The son notes that "I have done likewise. What makes me different from him is my self-distrust. Still that hasn't been sufficient to stop me." To which the reader wants only to add, you can say that again.

Unsteady Teddy

THEODORE DREISER: AT THE GATES OF THE CITY, 1871–1907. *By Richard Lingeman. Putnam. $22.95.*

Reviewed by THOMAS P. RIGGIO

In this first of a two-part biography of Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945), Richard Lingeman follows the novelist from his emotionally scarred childhood in Indiana during the 1870s to his literary apprenticeship as a journalist in Chicago, St. Louis, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh, and then to New York, the American literary mecca of the 1890s, where an editorial and free-lance writing career preceded his startling first novel, *Sister Carrie*. The action reaches a dramatic climax with the downhill plunge that accompanied Dreiser's nervous breakdown in 1902. The final chapters record the slow climb to physical and mental stability that came along with his success as a commercial editor. The book ends in 1907 with the thirty-six-year-old Dreiser poised for a comeback as a novelist, on the heels of the favorable reviews of a second edition of *Sister Carrie*.

This is the fullest *story* of Dreiser's early years we are likely to have for a while. I emphasize both the fullness and the narrative element, since these are the strengths of this first biography of the novelist since W. A. Swanberg's *Dreiser* (1965). So absorbed is Lingeman in his subject that he takes a volume of some 470 pages to cover the period to which both Swanberg and Dreiser's earlier biographer, Robert H. Elias, each devoted only a little over one hundred pages. As a native of Indiana, executive editor of the *Nation*, and the author of a book on small-town America, Lingeman relishes every detail of his chronicle of a midwesterner who went to the big city to make his name as a writer.

Relying on Dreiser's remarkable autobiographical record of his youth in *Dawn* and *Newspaper Days*, Lingeman recaptures much of the drama and color the novelist himself infused into his life story. Here we have Indiana in the 1870s and 1880s, its towns thick with provincial morality and evangelical fervor. Here the petty bourgeoisie, newly emerged from coarse frontier stock. Here the beleaguered mother who loves her large brood well but not wisely. Here the improvi-

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dent German father, a business failure and religious fanatic cut off by language and culture from his children—the pleasure-seeking, vagrant brothers and sisters Dreiser never tired of working into his fiction. Here that midwestern Falstaff, the genial songwriter Paul Dresser, the good brother who rescues the family at Christmas with gifts supplied by his mistress, the reigning courtesan of Evansville, whom he later memorialized in "My Gal Sal." Here the gaudy hotels of the burgeoning industrial cities, the newsrooms crowded with displaced scholars, failed writers, alcoholics, suicides—the very types the popular literature of the day conspired to keep out of its pages.

In telling this story, Lingeman uses the novelist's techniques of interior dialogue and dramatic irony. Like Dreiser, he often slips into journalese that is spotted with homely or literary clichés. We learn of sister Emma that "trouble fell on her like a load of hay"; that another sister wandered down "the primrose path"; that Paul Dresser's famous song about the Wabash "flows through the heartland of the American psyche like the river that inspired it"; that Dreiser was "there to pass on the torch to a new generation" of writers. There are expressions that seem to have been idiomatic in Teddy Roosevelt's day, as when Mrs. Dreiser is described as finding her "living conditions ever so jolly"—or this on Dreiser: "How bully to write about a man of power and wealth [Charles T. Yerkes] rather than fallen women and men in the story." Sometimes Lingeman moves into Dreiser's "poetic" mode: "Those sweet memories [of brother Paul] would waft back to him over the years like a whiff of flowers on a summer night."

Like Dreiser, too, Lingeman tells all he knows about the supporting players in his tale. At times he stops for pages to discuss important figures, like the British philosopher Herbert Spencer, or to introduce colorful characters—like the hard-nosed, laconic Joseph McCullagh, the St. Louis editor who ruled like a little Caesar over the Mississippi Valley newsworld of the 1890s. Though Dreiser tends to get lost in much of this, the material provides a sense of the texture and flavor of the period. The amassment of detail works especially well with the satellite figures in Dreiser's life. Even well-known relations—like the tangled one between the novelist and his brother Paul; or Dreiser's peculiar attachment to that male midwife to *Sister Carrie*, Arthur Henry; or his long courtship of his first wife, Sara Osborne White—emerge in these pages as fresh and fascinating portraits.

Lingeman brings a refreshingly different tone to the study of Dreiser. He is genuinely (if somewhat uncritically) fond of the man, whom he usually calls Theodore, and doesn't resort to the moralistic mudslinging that Dreiser often attracts for either his sexual vigors or his social and political views. When, for example, he recounts Dreiser's graphic descriptions of early sexual adventures, replete with a host of eager landladies and first loves, he resists the temptation of confusing Dreiser's later compulsive womanizing with the self-conscious (and often fearful) experimenting of the young man. As for Lingeman's view of Dreiser's politics, that seems to be reserved for the next volume. I find this somewhat surprising, because hints of Dreiser's later political stance can be found in his early writing and because Dreiser himself traced his political prejudices to the experiences of these years.

Lingeman uses documents that weren't available to other biographers, notably Dreiser's love letters to Sara White, diaries published only in recent years, and some of the early journalism. In notes he credits fully the critics and literary historians who have edited and analyzed these papers, acknowledging that his book is "not intended as a scholarly work" and that his ideal audience is "the cherished patron of serious writers, the general reader." While specialists should give him more credit for research than he asks for, even the general reader may question his unwillingness to use new evidence to reassess either the life or the work.

It must be said that Dreiser did not make biographical revision an easy task. Without a trace of the sense of privacy and decorum that amounts to an aversion to biography in writers like T. S. Eliot and James Joyce, Dreiser nevertheless presents special problems to the biographer of his early years. In huge autobiographies, in travel books like *A Hoosier Holiday*, and in autobiographical sketches like the recently published "An Amateur Laborer," he has virtually usurped the

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biographer's job. With these writings, which are at once confessional and aggressively self-justifying, he faced the biographer with the task of getting behind the story he told.

By the second and third decades of this century, when Dreiser was writing his memoirs, he naturally patterned the account of his life in the 1880s and 1890s to meet the demands of his later literary biases. The meaning he imposed upon the past had a logic that grew out of his conception of the writer he had become. Henry James addressed himself to this process when he cautioned that art often creates "life," not vice versa. Dreiser gave form to his own story in a manner consistent with the complex sensibility that went into the making of his fiction. Lingeman knows all this, as he at times suggests that Dreiser stretched the facts; but my main criticism of his book is that it avoids the central job of critical inquiry, which is to probe the imaginative reality behind the expression, so as better to understand the mind behind the writing.

Dreiser provides ample opportunities for such inquiry. In "An Amateur Laborer," to take one instance, he described his nervous breakdown after the publication of *Sister Carrie*. Out of fits of hallucination, of excruciating psychosomatic disorders, there came to him a vision of himself as "two persons"—one a vile, greedy egotist, the other a "philosophical soul who . . . was truly the oversoul in me." Lingeman forcefully recounts Dreiser's trauma, providing medical data for the various symptoms: under stress, Dreiser's weak eye could produce bizarre visions, a condition called cyclophoria; the drugs he was taking probably aggravated the case.

I, for one, am grateful to have the medical record set straight. But complex personal revelations contain another kind of truth, one that has less to do with historical fact than with the way a writer imagines the forces that shape his end. Besides his medical history, one would like to know more about *why* Dreiser chose, uncharacteristically, to underplay psychosomatic factors at the time of his crisis. Why did the novelist who has been read as, at best, an inconsistent mechanist invoke Emerson to account for the vision of his doppelgänger? Was it the attempt of a frustrated claimant to the American success story to assert his place in the literary mainstream of America—a place that he, the self-conscious son of an immigrant, could hardly take for granted? Does his secret sharer support H. L. Mencken's claim that Conrad was the contemporary writer closest, philosophically, to Dreiser? The life as Lingeman presents it leaves many such questions unasked, and so captures the experience, but often misses the meaning.

For the years covered by this book, the meaning has to do with, among other things, what Dreiser's story and the story of Carrie Meeber have in common. Both tell how individuals are cut off from the freedoms implicit in beliefs derived from nineteenth-century forms of idealism. This was not a popular story to tell in 1900, and Dreiser was not the only one telling it. By the time *Sister Carrie* appeared, Mark Twain, Henry Adams, Frank Norris, Stephen Crane—to name only a few American writers—had come to the same general conclusion; so had the European writers Dreiser most admired—Balzac, Spencer, Hardy, the early Tolstoy. From them he learned how to look at his sister's life, and eventually his own, and make a narrative out

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of it that was important and moving because of the way he had of imagining action and character in fictional form.

What distinguishes Dreiser from other writers on this side of the Atlantic is the completeness with which he broke from the prototypical American impulse toward unfettered freedom. His characters can no longer imagine a perfect freedom away from society, either in nature or a lost childhood. Instead they struggle for identity within a society in which they do not understand the rules—a society that often strangles their natural impulses and shapes their pained consciences. They desire to conquer the social order, not transcend it. As Dreiser makes clear in the case of Carrie, there is only the illusion of freedom. His insight into the pathology of material success goes still further. Even if one avoids the fate of Hurstwood, even if one succeeds, there remains the sense of unfulfillment that an earlier moral realist called "the hunger of the imagination." In such configurations of meaning and values Dreiser's story has most in common with his fiction.

Lingeman's account, in its density and sweep, implies all these meanings. His judgments of individual events and sequences are sound and never offensive. His discussion of Dreiser's free-lance journalism is especially impressive. What I find missing is a consistent point of view on Dreiser. This results in part from Lingeman's way of conceiving his work. He is simply not interested in the sort of interpretive approach that calls for the biographer to enter into dialogue with his subject. He is a self-effacing writer, content to let the story speak for itself rather than to seek a design in the carpet. His muscular prose and instinct for the concrete don't lend themselves easily to abstraction of any kind. He is reluctant to make evaluative judgments, either of the man or the writing, and most often avoids the psychological implications of Dreiser's actions. While this approach frees him to concentrate on his narrative, it also externalizes the life and places little emphasis on the conscious and unconscious revelations Dreiser built into the metaphors, symbols, and characterizations of his fiction and his books about himself. As a result, the drama of Dreiser's daily life overshadows the drama of the inner life found in the writing.

Although Lingeman devotes four chapters to *Sister Carrie*, he is less creative as a critic than as a storyteller. These chapters contain too much plot summary and what seem to me strained biographical connections, as when Drouet is seen as a reflection of the young Dreiser, Paul Dresser as one of the "psychological antecedents" of Hurstwood, and Carrie as a "sister" to Jane Addams, Margaret Sanger, and Emma Goldman. Nor is there much on how the book strayed from the previous literature on the subject or what doors it opened for later writers. Lingeman, in fact, appears more comfortable exploring the social and personal background to the novel than Dreiser as a novelist.

It would, for example, have been interesting to know what Dreiser's early journalism—much of which has only recently been identified—tells us about the writer who a few years later wrote *Sister Carrie*. By 1892 Dreiser was showing talent as a writer of special features, a brand of journalism then modeled on Dickens. He also wrote a column of hotel-lobby interviews called "Heard in the Corridors," many of which he fictionalized or simply invented. Occasionally he turned out a short story or poem. For two years, starting in 1895, he wrote columns for a magazine called *Ev'ry Month* and there pieced together a theory of fiction that he held to for the next fifty years. Most of this is hack work, it's true, but in Dreiser's hands it is also often autobiographical, filled with motifs that would appear years later in fiction and memoirs.

The novelist's first thirty years demand careful critical scrutiny, if only because we have had to rely mainly on Dreiser himself for what we know about this period. For instance, all his biographers have picked up the story he told of being a dreamer, a hapless romantic who, in Lingeman's words, "sought escape into a world of fantasy" even while he remained fascinated by the urban scene before him. The problem with this is that we are still left to account for the grasp of economic and social fact, the depth of psychological insight with which, in his late twenties, Dreiser practically invented the modern urban novel in America. With *Sister Carrie* he became one of the few American writers who changed irrevocably part of the whole constellation we call culture. Dreiser leaves us with the same puzzle Emerson faced when he read the first book of another American original, Walt Whitman, and wrote in wonder that the

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unknown poet "must have had a long foregound somewhere, for such a start."

While admirably filling in both foregound and background, Lingeman's biography leaves unexamined much of the complexity of Dreiser's imaginative life. He comes to his task not with a set of questions but with a fascination with character. On the positive side, this results in a moving historical narrative, exhaustively informed, sympathetic to its subject, often novelistic in its imaginative command of scene and personal drama. These are the best fruits of Lingeman's labors—an achievement worth applauding.

At the Quotidian

FRANCE: FIN DE SIÈCLE. *By Eugen Weber. Harvard University Press. $20.*

Reviewed by DAVID H. PINKNEY

Had Eugen Weber or the Harvard University Press wanted a subtitle for this book they might have chosen "A Personal History." Its subject, Weber explains in his introduction, is "those aspects of the fin de siècle that catch my attention." The actual title will recall to many readers Carl Schorske's *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, but Schorske's essays are carefully focused on the cultural consequences of a political conjuncture. Weber's attention has been caught by the frothy surface of history. "Most of life passes on the surface," he writes. "That is where I mostly looked." "This book is about the permanencies and novelties that affected private life." This point of view may recall Theodore Zeldin's *France, 1848–1945*, a book written in the apparent belief that everything is relevant, and Weber implies as much, although with some misgivings. He rather apologetically concludes his introductory statement of his purposes and intent with a caveat, "You have been warned." But Weber's many admirers, who know and cherish his skill with *petite histoire*, can be reassured; this is another informing and entertaining Weberian book.

The term *fin de siècle*, though in common usage, lacks in French history a firm temporal definition. It is sometimes taken for, erroneously Weber insists, the Belle Epoque, that "robust . . . , sanguine, productive" decade preceding 1914. For Weber the *fin de siècle* properly designates roughly the three decades after "The Terrible Year," 1871, a period of economic stagnation, perceived decadence, and pessimism, although, Weber argues, this is not a wholly accurate characterization of the times.

Readers will take away from this book an understanding of how Frenchmen lived in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, how their lives changed in those years, how they perceived their own condition, and how they foresaw the future. Students of the period will find some of this material familiar, and of much more of it they will have some awareness but probably without ever having thought much about it. In studying the "great events" of these years—the passage of the Ferry Laws, the Boulanger Affair, the Panama Scandal, the Dreyfus Affair, the negotiation of the Russian alliance—one easily forgets the mundane matters that preoccupied most French men and women. For example, keeping warm. Few

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houses were effectively heated or securely sealed against the wind. The many layers of clothes that everyone wore gave some protection against the cold but at the cost of other discomforts. Water was difficult or expensive to obtain. Inside plumbing was rare, even in Paris, and bathtubs rarer, and when Weber reminds us that taking a bath required carrying clean water up several flights of stairs and, *after* the bath, carrying it back down to the drain or gutter, we understand better why so few people bathed. They seldom washed their hair and seldom, if ever, brushed their teeth. Food in shops was commonly adulterated, wine watered or worse, and weights and measures dishonest. Family life was often violent and rarely affectionate. Marriage, even at the upper levels of society, "was not about pleasure, less about love." Women were legally treated as minors, and in peasant households, which were, of course, the majority, they were inferiors, barred from a man's tables and fare, doomed to lives of drudgery and childbearing.

The great world of politics and diplomacy cast dark shadows across the lives of even the little people. Like most Europeans after 1871, the French lived in the fear of war, and they, perhaps more than others, lived in fear of the upheaval of coup d'état or revolution. Political scandals exposed by the popular press and manifestations of a stalled economy were almost ever-present and reminders of the precariousness of the country's institutions and of individual and family security.

This is a gloomy picture, compatible with fin-de-siècle intellectuals' gloomy perceptions of the age. They, however, were concerned particularly with declining morality, intelligence, and integrity and with physical degeneration attributed to vice, alcohol, drugs, and tobacco and with the increasing incidence of crime. The obsession with decadence, so much written about, was confined to a minority of educated French, and Weber does not hide his irritation with them for creating a false but widely accepted and enduring impression of the fin de siècle in France.

For most of the French population, Weber maintains, the conditions of life, grim as they were, were improving. The fin de siècle was not only an ending; it was also a beginning of better times. More and more people were coming to share in the benefits of the scientific and technological revolutions of the nineteenth century. Medicine and advances in public health had ended the scourges of cholera, smallpox, and rabies. Diet was steadily improving. Compulsory primary education was bringing to all people the emancipation that comes with literacy. People were beginning to dress more comfortably. The installation of electric lights in department stores, hotels, railway stations, and government buildings, the first telephones, and the early automobiles were conspicuous technological marvels full of promise for the future. Women's lot was improved by the legalization of divorce in 1884, by extension of their rights to hold and manage property, and by increasing admissions into universities and professional schools. More women were marrying, and marrying earlier in life, and—owing to increased acceptance of birth control—having fewer children and finding pleasure in sex, hitherto usually a privilege of men.

Drudgery was still the common lot of worker and peasant, but leisure was ceasing to be a monopoly of the rich. Weber devotes four of his twelve chapters to exploration of how the French used this newly found luxury. They went to the theater in astounding numbers; each week half a million people attended the theater in Paris. Even the worker quarters of the city had theaters, and repertory companies played provincial theaters. Much of the new leisure seems to have been spent in sports and tourism. Heretofore "sports" usually meant horse racing or fencing, both aristocratic diversions. In the 1890s the falling price of bicycles had brought them within the means of thousands, and bicycling for exercise and recreation attracted many enthusiasts. Bicycle racing became the first popular spectator sport, and the Tour de France, the pinnacle of bicycle racing, which was first run in 1903, brought to many a somnolent village and town a new excitement and contact with a larger world.

Vacations with pay and the great August shutdowns were still a half century away, but in the 1880s and 1890s leisure and railroads were making travel for pleasure increasingly common. The French were discovering their own country as never before, and new standards of comfort were being established throughout the land. The new urban tourists

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demanded clean rooms, comforts, and service, and townsmen, at first especially in the spas and watering places, provided them, and in so doing both served their urban clients and introduced opulent urban styles of living into the provinces. As less wealthy travelers began to frequent the spas, they acquired a taste for the comforts of the affluent and began to bring them into their own homes. Conspicuous consumption was, of course, not new in France, but it had been limited to a tiny few. The spas and seaside hotels of the fin de siècle gave a much larger public a taste of its seductions.

Weber entitles his last chapter "The Best of Times." He might appropriately have used all of Charles Dickens's familiar statement, for the closing decades of the nineteenth century were "the best of times" or "the worst of times," depending on one's position in society. Evidence of both the good and the bad is there, and Weber reports both, but he believes that the former was prevailing. The title of Weber's final chapter emphasizes his conclusion that the age was more progressive than decadent. "The steady stream of small facts . . . ," Weber declares, "seems to testify for change. And perhaps for progress." No one familiar with the decades of the fin de siècle would quarrel with this cautious judgment.

I put the book down still wondering why the nineteenth century has a virtual monopoly on the terms *fin de siècle* to apply to its final decades. Other centuries in France's long history had their *fins*. We, living in a fin de siècle, may reasonably ask why the French of a century ago had so powerful a sense of things coming to an end and why they have been so successful in convincing us of their unique experience. Their compatriots in the twentieth century or a century before them—in the decades of the French Revolution, or two centuries before that—at the conclusion of the Wars of Religion and the end of the Valois dynasty, might seem to have claims at least as good to have lived in ages of endings. Weber writes of the nineteenth century that not since the final decades of the tenth century, at the close of the first millennium of the Christian era, had a "century made so much ado about its passing." But why was this the case and why have we taken it so seriously? "There was nothing very exceptional," Weber admits as he comes to the close of his book, "about the fin de siècle."

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The Reader Replies

Henry Nash Smith

I write to thank THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR for printing "The American Studies of Henry Nash Smith" (Spring 1987) and Richard Bridgman for giving us such a thoughtful and informative and appreciative account. It moves me to three observations.

The first, I am afraid, is a qualifier, or correction of fact. Mr. Bridgman's memorial essay opens with this statement: "The history of the American Studies movement has yet to be written, but we do know that it gained its early institutional form at Harvard in the middle thirties with the establishment of a doctoral program in American Civilization overseen by Howard Mumford Jones, and that its first graduate, in 1940, was Henry Nash Smith."

My suggested correction is simple. Henry Nash Smith may have been Harvard's first Ph.D. (in American Civilization) in 1940. But did that create the mold? Were there no others? I seem to remember that in 1931 Ralph H. Gabriel and Stanley T. Williams offered a course in Yale College that won instant attention (and imitation) under the title "American Thought and Civilization." Harvard had initiated a program in History and Literature in the twenties; so such a combination had been suggested. But at Yale it broadened and moved upstairs. And two years later, or in 1933, A. Whitney Griswold (later Yale's president) earned his Ph.D. in the Graduate School for a dissertation on the American success cult in a new program called "History, the Arts and Letters." That "H.A.L." program had English and European sections, too. The American branch took the name "American Studies" only when it was revived after World War II. But I had supposed that Griswold's was recognized as the first American Studies Ph.D. Were there others before 1940? I think of Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., Yale Ph.D., 1938.

My second observation betrays the prejudices and regrets of a historian. Henry Nash Smith was trained in American literature rather than in American history, as a professor taught in English departments, and would be one of the progenitors of the literary wing of the future blend called American Studies. When I first met him and our lifelong friendship began, at the Huntington Library in 1946, he was fresh from Texas and the troubles with President Rainey and the University of Texas, while I was struggling with my future history of Yale. So we first talked university issues and ideals. His book *Virgin Land* was still four years away, but it must have dawned on me that we also shared an intense interest in the myths of the West. Yet we hardly spoke the same language. I, who had grown up at Yale, and had been introduced to the many varieties of the West through the travel diaries and letters of Alexis de Tocqueville, was still simmering with my questioning of Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier hypothesis." Whereas Henry, who had absorbed his graduate experiences at Harvard, where the great Turner had taught and enthralled graduate students in American history almost to his death in 1932 (perhaps even beyond that date through Professor Frederick Merk) oddly and paradoxically seemed to have no awareness of the frontier theory of American history. Not sensing the potential importance, or perhaps because we were each too encased in our separate approaches, neither of us took full advantage of the learning opportunity.

For Henry, his long concentration would work. His images remained those of the literary or oratorical imagination, so perceptively understood that they helped create a new field of learning. Yet were they sufficiently historical, or broad enough to represent the general experience? For example, that image of "The Garden of the World"? Perhaps for poets and prophets and boosters. But what about all the rest of us? The West as "garden"? Somehow it now seems to me that that word (with its evocation of flowers and vegetables—no cows wanted) would have puzzled 90 percent of us, or seemed mighty literary, or made us laugh. Whereas "Free Land"—Turner's two key words—we would have understood. Historically, or in the main, or judged by our actions rather than by some of our words, wasn't the West for most Americans a rather different place? Didn't it stand more for adventure and opportunity, or empire and power, wealth and freedom, a new Jerusalem for saints or a hiding place for sinners and refugees? Farmers, of course, we were. But farming, as Mr. Bridgman shrewdly reminds us, had

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already (indeed long since) become a commercialized way of life. We were not just homesteaders but businessmen on the land, lumbering the timber, mining the fresh soils, and selling our "gardens" as real estate over and over again. Granted, we did this under the protection of a myth or sentimental illusion, the old (European) dream of the good and simple husbandman, and this wishful deception has stayed strong enough to cover the activities of giant agri-business today. But the magic word was and is "farm," not "garden." With honorable exceptions, we were not cultivators, not gardeners.

This skepticism of literary fancies, and a more general way of looking at the American performance and mind, may not sit well with some in the American Studies profession today. But as for Henry Nash Smith (and this is my third observation), I believe he would have accepted such a criticism—modestly, thoughtfully, quietly, and faintly humorously, as was his beguiling wont—and would have made no claims or direct rebuttals. Instead he would have listened . . . and continued to try to explore the world of literary images in his own inimitable and invaluable way. I will always admire him. He was quite a man.

GEORGE WILSON PIERSON
Larned Professor of History Emeritus
Yale University

Apocryphal Johnsonianisms

I was surprised (better, astonished) at a letter in the Autumn 1987 SCHOLAR (p. 601) seriously attributing to Samuel Johnson that ancient chestnut about the pedantic adulterer's reply to his wife on being found in the embrace of the maid. It has been ascribed to innumerable lexicographers, including Noah Webster and even Emile Littré (it works just as well in French: "Non, ma chérie, c'est *nous* qui sommes surpris; *tu* es *étonnée*"). There is no more evidence of its authenticity than of Marie Antoinette's "Let them eat cake" and George Washington's "I did it with my little hatchet."

Over forty years ago, the doyen of American Johnson scholars, the late James L. Clifford, proposed a compilation of apocryphal sayings attributed to Johnson. One of the two examples he cited was the "surprised/astonished" one. The other was that of a lady who said, "Doctor Johnson, you smell," to which he replied, "No, madam, *you* smell; *I* stink." (I actually heard the latter from the lips of an eminent historian of science during the commemoration in 1984 of the bicentenary of Johnson's death.) But Clifford found the scope of the project so immense that he gave it up.

It is depressing to find *The American Scholar* continuing to give its imprimatur to this hoary jape. A scholarly study of Johnson's "resounding putdowns" will show many others to be equally apocryphal.

DONALD GREENE
Los Angeles, California

Homer's Heroic Nerd

Mary R. Lefkowitz's thoughtful "The Heroic Women of Greek Epic" (Autumn 1987) draws a neat distinction in the epics between men and women. The men, by virtue of princely rank and battlefield prowess, are the only ones whom Homer (and the Greeks generally) recognizes as heroic. No others need apply. But as Lefkowitz shows, women such as Penelope and Helen are special; in a strife-torn world, they often appear compassionate, articulate and courageous and thus in a modern sense can be considered heroic.

Studies that make gender a focus of attention tend to invite overly simple distinctions between men and women. Still if there is any place where simple distinctions are justified, it is probably in *The Iliad* where very long accounts of the athletic exploits of individual men in battle suggest that old Homer, if nothing else, was a great sportswriter. We are grateful for even modest accounts of women's work and thought as relief from the incessant game of war.

But are all the men warriors? Not quite. For a brief moment in Book Two of *The Iliad* there hobbles onto the stage the ugliest of the Greeks, Thersites. Balding, round-shouldered and lame, this brilliantly articulate commoner—notorious for taunting the nobility—tells King Agamemnon that he is an idiot for having quarreled with a better man, Achilles. And since the Greeks have captured quite enough booty and women to sleep with, the time has come to sail home. What a stupid war!

Richmond Lattimore pointed out that the argument is unanswerable. Agamemnon says nothing—kings don't bother with commoners—but Odysseus, the man of action, in the manner of the school-yard bully, threatens to strip the queer Thersites bare and throw him in the ocean if he does not shut up. He then clobbers Thersites who sits down and starts crying. Everyone laughs and the war goes on. After having stolen the show, the ugly one disappears forever.

The Lefkowitz revelation of woman's dignity and courage in the ancient epic might stir within the modern woman a sense of pride. So too for today's misfits, mavericks, and awkward souls (whatever their age or sex), there is Thersites. He possessed the mad courage to taunt a king and tell the truth. In a violent world of gods and fighting men, he is the nerd who must be reduced to crybaby. But in sardonic verse that echoes through the ages, he

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denounced the folly of war and trashed the foolish pride of kings. How the nerd spoke! For us, if not for Homer, he must be reckoned—hero.

JAMES L. WUNSCH
Pelham, New York

Max's American

The fact that Max Beerbohm married an American doesn't disprove Mary Lago's idea in her review of *The Illustrated Zuleika Dobson* (Winter 1987) that he got Oover's American speech in *Zuleika Dobson* so wrong out of "disdain for Americans." Florence Kahn could have been the exception that proved the rule. But I lean to Katherine Lyon Mix's argument in "Max and the Americans" that ". . . Abimelech's speech is parody of parody, but the original parody was not intended by Max; rather, it was the stage-American used by English playwrights, and believed, as Max often remarked, by the English to be an accurate reproduction of transatlantic talk. . . . Max intended Abimelech to be the burlesque of the stage-American seen in the London theatres. He spoke the platitudes, the cliches, the slang, heard by a London audience." Oover's given name is so stage-Yankee in its Old Testament grotesqueness that it goes far to prove Mix's point.

I'm not an expert, but I find this explanation more plausible, and more attractive, than the idea that Max's ear should have failed him in this one case—or, worse, that Max would have let a personal dislike introduce a false note into his art.

JEFFREY M. LANDAW
Baltimore, Maryland

Erratum

I wonder if, in referring to the "songwriter Yip Yarborough" ("You Probably Don't Know Me," Autumn 1987), Aristides meant the same man who wrote "Brother, Can You Spare a Nickel" and "It's Only a Paper Towel."

I think he meant E. Y. "Yip" Harburg.

Ah, fame.

SY BARASCH
Woodhaven, New York

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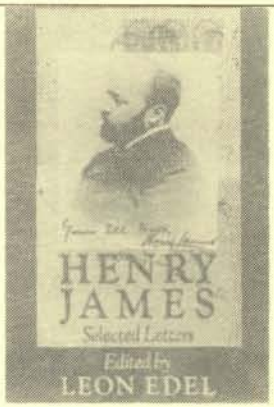

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